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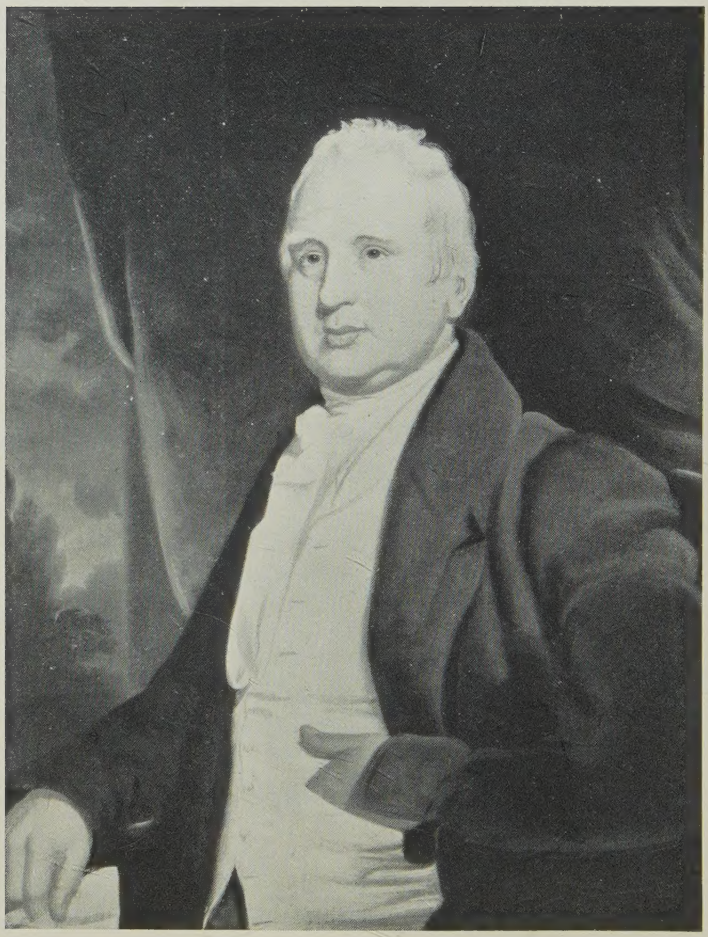

WILLIAM COBBETT

From the painting in the National Portrait Gallery. Painter uncertain

PIONEERS OF REFORM

COBBETT, OWEN, PLACE, SHAFTESBURY, COBDEN, BRIGHT

BY

D. C. JOHNSON

M.A., B. Litt.

WITH A PREFACE BY

SIDNEY WEBB

WITH SIX PORTRAITS

METHUEN & CO. LTD.

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PREFACE

THIS interesting account of six 'Pioneers of Reform'—attractive in its unpretentiousness and able in the insight with which it is written—affords a useful vision of nineteenth-century Britain, complementary to the historical textbooks. Behind the numerous political and legislative reforms which mark off in British history the past hundred years from any previous period, we have to note the new factor of widespread and continuous agitation. What Miss Johnson gives us is an introductory sketch of the work of the agitator, a figure as objectionable to most of his contemporaries in the nineteenth century as the 'enthusiast' was in the eighteenth.

The word 'agitator', in the sense of instigator of public opinion appears to have been first used in England in 1647 for an agent of the rank and file of the Parliamentary army. It was, however, apparently not employed in its present sense until nearly the end of the eighteenth century, whilst it did not come into general use until just a hundred years ago. It was, in fact, Daniel O'Connell, the 'Great Agitator', to whom the term was first commonly applied. Cobbett and Owen, Place and Shaftesbury, Cobden and Bright were all in their several ways effective agitators. Throughout the whole century the purpose of the agitators—the alteration of public opinion—remained identical. We may trace, however, a gradual change of method. Justin McCarthy, in his *History of Our Own Times*,[1] puts the dividing line about 1840. 'With the Manchester School,' he observes, 'began a new kind of popular agitation. Up to that time agitation meant appeal to passion. . . . The Manchester School introduced the agitation which appealed to reason and argument only: which stirred men's hearts with figures of arithmetic rather than figures of speech. The contrast between Daniel O'Connell and Richard

[1] *History of Our Own Times*, by Justin McCarthy, Vol. I, p. 337.

Cobden is sufficiently striking. But the genus agitator includes different species. Great is the difference between the work of Francis Place, the champion ' manipulator ', and that of Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the most effective of ' prophets '. A comparative analysis of the methods and achievements of all the principal agitators of the past hundred years would be a useful study in Political Science.

One measure of the effectiveness of the various methods of agitation by which pioneers lead the world to follow in the course they indicate is the time that it takes to effect this result. An historical survey of the actual ' time-lag ' in the achievement of social change, in the various agitations of the past hundred years, would throw some light on the effectiveness of different methods and different personalities—perhaps, also on the different resistances to particular kinds of change. The Anti-Slavery Movement lasted more than half a century, but the Anti-Corn Law League less than a decade. What was it that brought success to Place's agitation for the bare legalization of Trade Unions within a couple of decades, whilst the much more magnificent efforts of Carlyle can hardly be said to have resulted in any reforming statute in half a century ? Is the time-lag getting longer or shorter ? If I may be so bold as to give a figure, I should say that there is some evidence that, in the twentieth century, the interval between the ' push-off ' of a dynamic idea and the result in legislation is round about nineteen years. Success so long delayed may seem worth little to impatient youth, but the true pioneer will not be discouraged. Nothing valuable can be gained at a rush. Further investigation into the time-lag is emphatically worth making.

Meanwhile, I very heartily commend Miss Johnson's interesting and instructive sketch to all who seek light on the historical period about which we are commonly most in darkness, namely, that immediately preceding our own !

SIDNEY WEBB

PASSFIELD CORNER, LIPHOOK, HANTS

1 June 1929

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* *Photographs : National Portrait Gallery*

PIONEERS OF REFORM

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: REFORMERS, THEIR TASK AND INSPIRATION

FOR twenty-six years at the beginning of the nineteenth century a Tory Lord Chancellor sat on the Woolsack and devoted great abilities to opposing every suggestion for reform or change of any sort. Yet this embodiment of the policy of standing still once made the startling declaration, 'If I were to begin life again I would begin as an agitator.' Lord Eldon was a self-made man, and his declaration, so strangely at variance with his practice, arose out of his shrewd perception that in the circumstances of the day agitation offered a promising career to a man who wished to make himself felt.

The first half of the nineteenth century abounded in agitations. 'Movements' were not new, but these years saw them on a scale and with a frequency not hitherto known. Campaigns for the Abolition of Slavery, for the Emancipation of Roman Catholics, for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, for the People's Charter, for Parliamentary Reform, were only the most notable of a far larger number of movements which kept the country in a ferment. The intervals between these large-scale agitations were filled up by lesser ones for a Ten Hours Day, a Free Press, Repeal of the New Poor Law. Nothing succeeds like success, and each successful agitation encouraged new ones; the Irish Roman Catholics found inspiration in the success of the movement for the abolition of the Slave Trade, and the 'Ten Hours Men' stated that they had been

encouraged to persevere by the achievements of the Anti-Corn Law League.

The leaders of these movements were not, as Lord Eldon would seem to imply, self-seekers working for their own advancement. They were, in fact, almost invariably moved by the most disinterested motives; but it is undeniable that they played an influential part in the public life of the time. To this class of disinterested agitators belong the six men who form the subject of this book. Cobbett, Owen, Place, Lord Shaftesbury, Cobden, and Bright all held important places in the nation's affairs, but they played their parts outside the framework of the official system of government. Ministers and officials made policy and governed the country, but they had, on occasion, to take into account the views of those whom Cobden once described as 'unofficial statesmen'. A large part of the history of England lies in the biographies of her Ministers, but certain aspects of it will be completely understood only if the biographies of her 'unofficial statesmen' are studied as well. These men, and others like them, exercised a great influence over the heart and mind of the nation because they had a twofold task to perform; they represented outside opinion, but they also helped to form that opinion. They had first to devise reforms which would remedy the ills they saw, and then they had to rouse, instruct, and organize public opinion, which they could bring to bear on the official statesmen.

These six men carried on their work in days when Parliament was only a very partial reflection of the nation and the bulk of the people had slight chance of making their needs and desires known. Cobbett, Owen, Place, Lord Shaftesbury, Cobden, and Bright, in different spheres, made good this defect in the Constitution to some extent, throwing a slender bridge from time to time across the gulf that separated government from governed. Similar work was performed by Wilberforce and the later agitators against the Slave Trade and Slavery, by Chadwick for Public Health, by Oastler for Factory Regulation,

by O'Connell for Roman Catholic Emancipation, by Lovett and O'Connor and Attwood for the Charter. They were all unpopular. ' An agitating philanthropist is worse than any,' was Greville's complaint, and he was not the only one who groaned at their ' iteration and reiteration '. They were probably all bores to those not in sympathy with their causes, but they were all doing a work that was sadly needed.

Agitation arises out of grievances, and the period between 1800 and 1850 offered plenty of grievances on which active reformers could set to work. ' Present Discontents ' exist in every age, but there had been a peculiar combination of circumstances at work in England between 1770 and 1830 which had created discontents of unusual urgency. In 1793 England entered on a war with France which ended only in 1815, so that a whole generation of people had known nothing but the abnormal conditions that are inevitably produced by prolonged warfare. War is always expensive, and in those years prices and taxation alike were very high. The food supply was at times scarce, for the government bought heavily for the fighting forces, foreign supplies were not available, and bad harvests were frequent. Most important of all, war is bound to absorb the whole attention of a government to the exclusion of all else, and the British governments of those years, straining their eyes to see what was happening on the other side of the Channel, overlooked what was happening at their feet. Distress and discontented murmurings, bread riots and machine breaking indicated from time to time that all was not well at home ; but the government was filled with that ' war-spirit ' which demands from its subjects complete subordination and uncritical loyalty. It regarded all discontent, whatever its cause, as treason which must be put down with all possible severity.

This attitude of unyielding repression towards popular movements had taken firm hold in England even before war began. It was the outcome of the French Revolution. The conditions favourable to the outbreak of a revolution

in England were not present, but as the French Revolution passed through its stages of increasing violence the English governing classes naturally watched apprehensively for signs of its spread to this side of the Channel. Jacobin clubs in France were instruments of violence, so the formation of any sort of club in England was suspect. Riots might lead to revolution, criticism of the system of government might be only the beginning of its overthrow, attempts to end abuses might be the cover under which monarchy was threatened, and thus 'Anti-Jacobinism' seized the government and the upper classes. The working classes in England became objects of suspicion because of the deeds of the peasants in France; they must be kept under. The government therefore came into touch with the masses only as the author of laws which limited their liberty, and as the authority which quelled, with military force if necessary, all attempts to claim rights or to gain relief from grievances. Rights, even the right to the most rudimentary form of protection, suggested 'Rights of Man' to a nervous government, and liberty even to protest was ominously reminiscent of 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. This state of mind was strengthened still further by the outbreak of war, which enabled the governing classes to condemn as lack of patriotism every sort of criticism of the national system of government.

The Revolution and the war worked together disastrously to produce an unfortunate influence on English affairs. War caused bad conditions and revolution produced an unsympathetic attitude towards these conditions in the people who alone could have remedied them. But as well as bringing new evils war and revolution aggravated old wrongs, checking that gradual process of change which normally prevents remedies from lagging unbearably far behind ills. The French Revolution put a complete stop to a quite promising movement for political reform which had taken its rise in the unsuccessful attempt of George III to recover for the Crown its ancient power. The method of electing Parliament

which was to become so famous and so anomalous before it was remedied in 1832, and the extent of corruption embodied in the system of ' rotten boroughs ', placemen, and sinecures, had roused criticisms as early as 1760. Pitt himself had actually introduced a Bill to abolish a small part of the worst abuses, and Burke's Economical Reform Bill had made a beginning on the reduction of corruption. ' Homebred Radicalism ' had appeared, with Horne Tooke and Cartwright as its spokesmen and reform of Parliament as its programme. But there was a complete change of attitude when events in France had shown their trend. Pitt became the opponent instead of the supporter of political reform, mild Radicals were converted to Conservatism, convinced Radicals formed societies doomed to suppression by the government. By laws and prosecutions Pitt struck down those bold enough to continue to advocate any change in the Constitution, which was now commonly described as ' matchless ' and was a source of immense national pride. Men now found themselves in prison for saying what Pitt had said in earlier days, that the country would benefit from reform in the method of electing Parliament. The bulk of the nation swung on to the same side as the Prime Minister ; the tiny minority who remained staunch to their reform convictions could organize themselves only in illegal ways and could express their Radical views only at risk to liberty. Thus events checked reform at a moment when for various reasons it was about to become more urgently necessary ; and old evils were artificially preserved to join their weight to the heavy burden of new ills which a new dispensation was about to bring upon the country.

In one other way also the combined influence of the revolution and the war was unfortunate The latter part of the eighteenth century saw a marked growth of humane feeling which found expression in numerous philanthropic associations, aimed at lessening particular forms of suffering. Dispensaries, soup kitchens, visiting societies testified to this increased sensibility to wretchedness ;

while the two great humanitarian movements for Prison Reform and for the Abolition of Slavery showed what an immense fund of humane feeling lay behind public opinion and could be made effective if men like Howard, Wilberforce, and their helpers would devote themselves to the work of calling it forth.

The severe and unsympathetic attitude of government to governed which resulted from revolution and war had a chilling effect on many forms of this humanitarianism. Those forms which survived either took on a more ' charitable ' tinge, in the less pleasant sense of the word ' charity ', or were inspired by a selfish desire to placate the dangerous classes by soothing their discontent with soup, blankets, or allotments. The great campaign against the slave trade was, it is true, brought to a successful issue during the very course of the war, but the slaves were not in England, so that their position was not bound up with politics or internal law and order. Other forms of philanthropy, too, continued, so long as they had no suggestion of ' rights ' on the part of those they were intended to benefit ; the famous Sir Thomas Bernard, for instance, founded his ' Society for Bettering the Conditions and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor ' in 1796, when the comforts of the poor were indeed few, but when the political and military situations were most troubled. Despite exceptions, however, the general effect of the revolution and the war was to dry up the springs of humanity and to fill the ' Haves ' with fear and dislike of the ' Have-Nots ' rather than with sympathy for their needs.

This check on political reform and on sympathy with the lower classes was made particularly serious by the important series of changes which took place in agriculture, industry, and transport in the years preceding and during the war. The England which entered the war in 1793 had been fundamentally altered when the war came to an end in 1815. The changes in industry and society made the need for overhauling the system of government, which had been felt, but not urgently, in 1770, infinitely

more necessary. The Industrial Revolution created new classes which, being new, had no place in the Matchless Constitution. Great new towns arose round the new factories of the North, containing a large part of the population and wealth of the country. But no Members of Parliament represented these towns because the distribution of Members dated back to an earlier England. Real power fell more and more into the hands of the new 'captains of industry', the towns in the North and Midlands grew steadily more important, but votes were confined to landowners, to corporations of ancient boroughs now of small importance and to the South. The political machine, in short, had ceased to keep pace with the economic machine, and the defects of the system which had roused earlier Radicals on more or less theoretical grounds now became a heavy practical drag on national strength.

At the same time the bulk of human suffering and of distress was greatly increased by the changes which turned England from an agricultural into an industrial country and substituted factories for the old family unit of industry. To the old classes of unfortunates, such as the little sweeps who had aroused Jonas Hanway's sympathies in the eighteenth century, was now added an overwhelming number of new victims. Child labour in the new factories was accompanied by many horrors of overwork and ill-treatment. The new towns, built purely for profit and not for the comfort of their inhabitants, were scenes of squalor and wretchedness, the old towns became hideously overcrowded, and old and new alike were full of disease, lacking water, sanitation, and everything that makes life bearable where large numbers are housed in small space. Hand-workers saw their wages driven down to, or below, starvation level by the competition of cheap machine-made cotton goods. Factory workers earned wages barely adequate to keep them alive, and suffered from frequent unemployment through fluctuations of trade; the conditions under which they worked, though possibly no more unhealthy than those

which they had endured in their 'domestic days', were less congenial because freedom was gone and routine was irksome. They felt their dependence on a master and the unaccustomed steady application involved in tending machinery driven by mechanical power wore down their spirit. Most of them were cut off from the country for the first time, in the growing specialization which marked themachine age, and many experienced the sense of loss put into words by one of them: 'The commons of our fathers are enclosed, the green grass of the healthful hayfield is shut out from our path, the whistling of the birds is not for us . . . our melody is the deafening noise of the engine.'

Those who remained behind in the country had their own troubles, no less serious. Scientific methods of farming encouraged large-scale farms at the expense of small. Enclosure, both of commons and of strips, harmed the small man, so that many who had hitherto been independent cultivators were forced to sell to a more fortunate neighbour and sink into the dependent position of a day labourer, or to make their way to the nearest town and seek work in a factory. The labourer saw his wage sink until it was no longer sufficient to keep him alive, and the device by which the well-meaning but bewildered magistrates sought to right this threw even the employed labourer on to the Poor Law, which made him an 'Allowance' bringing up his wage to the minimum sum considered adequate to his barest needs. This system encouraged farmers to lower wages still further, and, by mingling poor relief and wages in inextricable confusion, took away all incentive to effort, since the rewards of industry and independence were in no way greater than those of idleness and extravagance. One Member of Parliament considered it reasonable that the wages of the country labourer should be lower than those of the town worker, since, although seven shillings might be rather little for a man and family to live on, they had all the joys that come from

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn

to set against their narrow means. The country labourer doubtless found this as comforting as the historic advice of the noble lord who urged him to try a little curry powder in water as a substitute for food in the ' Hungry 'Forties '.

As the face of the land was transformed, mines and Blake's ' Satanic Mills ' bringing into existence that ' pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night ' to hang over the North and Midlands, so society was transformed. The old close-knit society of the village or small town disappeared, and the labouring classes lost the fixed status that they had enjoyed. Intervening classes dropped out, leaving farmer facing dependent day labourer in the country, as capitalist faced dependent worker in towns. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer ; the sum of the national wealth increased enormously, but its distribution became more uneven than of old, and the seeds of class bitterness were sown. The Industrial Revolution has, in the long run, brought material benefits to all classes ; the standard that is regarded as a ' minimum ' is to-day higher than that of the old ' domestic ' days. But the years of transition were very painful to many, and the generation which reached manhood just after the Napoleonic wars felt the immediate distress without being able to foresee or to enjoy the ultimate benefits.

The new world that was coming into being between 1770 and 1830 presented itself under different guises according to the angle from which it was viewed. To the government intent on the struggle with Napoleon, industrialism appeared a beneficent force, providing the money, food, and equipment essential for the prosecution of the war. When the war ended England was richer, despite the cost of war, than she had been when it began ; she had become ' the workshop of the world, the forge of the world, the banker of the world, and the world's greatest carrier '. And she had in consequence been able to stand the strain even when 40 per cent of her shipping was being destroyed by her enemies. Manufacturers viewed with joy the boundless

possibilities of fortunes opened out to them by steam and machinery, farmers found themselves rich enough to discard ancient standards of living and to ape the gentry, landlords grew rich on higher rents. Many who had no direct part in the new developments were thrilled by the feeling of progress symbolized by the growth of man's control over matter. Macaulay gave expression to this sentiment in his famous speech : ' Our fields are cultivated with a skill unknown elsewhere, which has extracted rich harvests from moors and morasses. Our houses are filled with conveniences which the kings of former times might have envied. Our bridges, our canals, our roads, our modes of communication fill every stranger with wonder. Nowhere are manufactures carried to such perfection. Nowhere does man exercise such dominion over matter.' In similar strain Arthur Young rejoiced that ' the goths and vandals of open field farmers ' had died out, and Bentham talked complacently about ' the happy conquests of peaceful industry '.

The other side of the changes was effectively summed up by Carlyle : ' England is full of wealth or multifarious produce, supply for human want of every kind ; yet, England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows ; waving with yellow harvests ; thick studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the cunningest and the willingest our earth ever had.' Yet, ' Is anyone better, braver, beautifuller ? Are they even what they call happier ? Has the successful industry of England made anybody richer ? ' The marvel of machine production appeared to the hand-worker as the competition of some untiring inhuman monster. The wonderful ease with which machines could be worked came home to the labouring class as the cause of child employment and, in part, of their own unemployment. Cheap goods were beneficial, but not to the man to whom goods cheap or dear were all equally inaccessible. Factories meant, in the long run, efficiency, and so economy of effort, but to the first generation of

men employed in them they seemed like prisons, hatefully inhuman. Enclosure meant increased production of food and high rents and profits, but, looked at from the other side, it meant the loss of those ' common rights ' of fuel and of pasturage which helped to eke out a scanty living and alone enabled the smallest strip-holder to exist on his tiny holding. The new world which to Macaulay seemed so pleasantly ' full of a number of things ' appeared to those who lived in closer contact with it a place of hideous uncertainty. Industries rose and fell, employment fluctuated, status was destroyed, the family unit broken up, class distinctions were made harder. Machinery did not diminish the total amount of employment, but it dislocated it, and this was particularly serious as the system of Poor Relief and Settlement made it very difficult for labourers to move in obedience to the shifting demand for labour. Wages were not universally low, but large numbers lived on the verge of starvation while the slow battle between machine and hand production was fought to its inevitable end. Wretchedness did not begin with machinery, nor were child employment, overwork, and unhealthy surroundings new evils. It was the scale on which these evils prevailed during the period of transition that was notable, and it must be remembered that the new evils came in addition to, and not instead of, the old ones. The contrast between the smiling face that the Industrial Revolution turned to Macaulay and the grim guise that it wore in the eyes of the workers was well brought out by the Chartist poet who wrote ' The Song of the Working Classes ' :

> Down, down we go, we're so very, very low,
> To the hell of the deep-sunk mines,
> But we gather the proudest gems that glow
> When the crown of the despot shines.
> And whenever he lacks, upon our backs
> Fresh loads he deigns to lay ;
> We're far too low to vote the tax
> But not too low to pay.

We plough and sow—we're so very, very low,
That we delve in the dirty clay,
Till we bless the plain with the golden grain
And the field with the fragrant hay.
Our place we know—we're so very, very low,
'Tis down at the landlord's feet;
We're not too low the bread to grow
But too low the bread to eat!

So long as the war lasted it provided not only an excuse for the government to suppress all expression of discontent, but a hope for the sufferers that the end of the war would see the end of their misery. They took courage to endure from the anticipation of the plenty and prosperity that proverbially accompanied peace.

Peace, when at last it came, brought disillusionment and the further dislocation that peace, no less than war, is bound to involve. The displaced hand-workers now found their ranks swelled by thousands of demobilized soldiers and sailors, who helped to lower wages and to raise the poor rates. An exhausted Continent ceased to buy our goods, turning its attention once more to its own production, the home government no longer purchased heavily for the forces, foreign corn could again be imported. And while trade stopped with the end of the war, war debts and the consequent taxation did not stop. It was the burdensome taxation of the years following the Peace of 1815 which inspired Sidney Smith's witty summary:

Taxes upon every article which enters into the mouth or covers the back or is placed under the foot—taxes upon everything which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell, or taste—taxes upon warmth, light and locomotion—taxes on the sauce which pampers man's appetite and the drug which restores him to health—on the ermine which decorates the judge and the rope which hangs the criminal—on the poor man's salt and the rich man's spice—on the brass nails of the coffin and the ribands of the bride. The schoolboy whips his taxed top—the beardless youth manages his taxed horse with a taxed bridle, on a taxed road—and the dying Englishman,

pouring his medicine, which has paid 7%, into a spoon that has paid 15%, flings himself back upon his chintz bed, which has paid 22%, and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a licence of 100 pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then taxed from 2 to 10%. Besides the probate, large fees are charged for burying him in the chancel; his virtues are handed down to posterity on taxed marble, and he is then gathered to his fathers—to be taxed no more. (1820).

Cries of distress rose from town and country alike and found utterance in the old way, in machine breaking, bread riots, and rick burning. The government's answer was also the old one, repression, and it has been said that the history of England for the four years after the war ended resembles the history of a country at war. The worst was over by 1820, but for another thirty years no permanent prosperity came to hearten the working classes. Between 1825 and 1850 the tide of popular distress ebbed and flowed; good harvests brought temporary lightening of burdens; at times the people were passive in misery, at times despair drove them to revolt. In 1830, in 1839, in 1842, and 1848 there were risings, but as the first half of the century drew to a close various causes worked together to lessen troubles.

The lessening of distress and discontent which came at last was in part due to the work of these 'pioneers of reform'. Amid general indifference they stepped forward as champions of those who were unable to help themselves. They first asserted that the ills could be cured, and, ignorance being a hindrance to reform, they took care to see that the facts were published abroad. When ignorance had been shattered they worked on the social conscience until a sense of responsibility was roused, and then they produced cures for the evils which public opinion was brought to approve and advocate. Success did not always meet their efforts, but the mere attempt put heart into the oppressed, educated them in the need for effort and the best direction for applying it, and contributed to that development of capacity in the mass of workers by

which in the end they were able to fight their own battles.

Reforms came very slowly and in piecemeal fashion, so that the life of a reformer was most laborious, and a monstrous amount of effort was needed to obtain small results. To translate into action those wider visions which they saw but which were not present to the ' man in the street ' needed a great deal of that ' pricking ' of officials which Plato has described as the function of such men, whom he calls ' gadflies of the State '. This stinging of reluctant men into action caused one of the stung to exclaim impatiently of Lord Brougham, prince of ' gadflies ', ' There never was such a nuisance as the man is.' It was this irritating persistence of the agitator which called forth the gloomy forecast of one member of the House of Commons that ' Cobden is going to be a worrying man on corn '.

The slowness with which reform progressed and the partial way in which it came is remarkable at first sight, but can be explained. That the slowness was not due to a lack of humanity can be assumed from the humane abolition of slavery, which took place during the very years when the nation was perfectly indifferent to the sufferings of the children in factories. This difference in attitude sprang from the difference in the degree of realization. Thanks to the work of Wilberforce and an able band of agitators there was little that the public did not know about the sufferings of the slaves. Of the sufferings caused by factory conditions little was guessed, even by those living in the factory districts. Disraeli described England as ' Two Nations ' sundered by an impassable gulf, and this was particularly true of the complete ignorance which veiled the daily existence of the less fortunate of the two nations from the consciousness of the more fortunate.

Some people knew what was going on, and a few earnest men, like the group headed by Dr. Percival in Manchester, did what lay within their power to deal with the evils that came into their own sphere. Many,

however, of those who knew, had what Bentham called ' sinister interests ' in the maintenance of conditions by which they personally benefited.

But behind the long continuance of evils lay more than ' sinister interests ' and public apathy. Times were very bewildering, new problems pressed hard for solution, and men felt sadly astray in the rapidly changing world. For guidance they looked to the experts, and the experts on these matters were the economists. The sort of guidance that was given by them can be deduced from the name bestowed in the early days on Economics, ' the Dismal Science '.

The first chapter in the economic gospel had been written by Adam Smith in 1776, when he published his *Wealth of Nations*, and his teaching on this matter of social problems seemed clear to searchers. Adam Smith, as interpreted, taught that the first condition of national prosperity was freedom in trade and the absence of governmental interference. Trade was like a river, and its flow must be as little interrupted as possible. In matters of trade, manufacture, wages, and prices, therefore, no government could usefully interfere, whence it was clear that these problems of the distribution of the new wealth must be left to work themselves out. That the results of this unregulated working out would be satisfactory was ensured by a fortunate instinct implanted in each man by Providence, an instinct which caused him always to act in his own best interest. The most benevolently-minded government could not help a man better than by leaving him to the guidance of this instinct, nor could it better serve its own ends, since the national wealth obviously consists only of the sum of the wealth of all the individuals composing the nation. No one, Adam Smith points out, either buys or sells unless he thinks it to his advantage to do so ; therefore neither side needs outside intervention, since man and master can each secure his own highest good by unfettered freedom in bargaining. The *Wealth of Nations* contains other things and other applications of this central doctrine of freedom,

but a popular version of a theory always differs from the original, at least through incompleteness, if not through misunderstanding.

This advice to ' let-be '—*laissez-faire*—received further sanction from later economists. Generalizing from the abnormal circumstances of their own day, they formulated a number of ' economic laws ' which seemed to bind the working class still more tightly in the bonds of its misery. According to Malthus, there was an ' Iron Law of Population ' which kept population always great enough to threaten the food supply. The poorest people, therefore, inevitably lived always on the verge of starvation, and the numbers were only kept down to the point at which the number of mouths to be fed just did not exceed the amount of food by ' Nature's harsh medicines ', disease and hardship. Any artificial attempt to raise the poorest above this level by increasing the food supply must fail, since this law works with the inevitability of a natural law ; more food will bring more mouths, and the proportion between food and mouths will soon be exactly as it was. Similarly, interference with nature's methods of retaining the balance are doomed to failure, since lessening of hardship will increase the population so that the food will no longer suffice and starvation will once more redress the balance.

Wages are regulated in the same unalterable way by a force beyond human control. The amount to be paid in wages is fixed, the economists taught. Extra wages in any one trade can only be gained at the expense of another ; no general rise in wages is possible, so that in no sphere can interference save the wretched worker from his wretchedness. Wages and food can only be left to the play of natural forces and the result accepted in a fatalistic spirit, as beyond human agency. This doctrine of the economists discouraged the sympathetic, quietened the consciences of the indifferent, and appeared to justify the worst selfishness of those who were benefiting from the new world of steam and machinery.

This teaching of the uselessness of interference in

economic matters by State or philanthropist received a wider application from the views of Bentham. Bentham, the Utilitarian philosopher, had such a profound influence on opinion and on reforms in the first half of the nineteenth century that his views are worth studying in some detail. As generally accepted Bentham stood for *laissez-faire* in all matters, not only in those concerned with trade. Seeking for a test by which to judge which law and institutions stood in need of reform, he took ' utility ' for his standard, and by utility he understood ' the greatest happiness of the greatest number '. Obviously, a man is himself the best judge of what contributes to his own happiness, so that this principle leads, like that of free trade, to an ideal of government which cuts it down to the smallest possible limit. Adam Smith had said : ' It is the highest impertinence for kings and ministers to pretend to watch over the economy of private people,' but Bentham went further, declaring ' All government is in itself one vast evil.' Bentham was most influential in the nineteenth century, but he wrote his books earlier, and when his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* was published, in the year of the French Revolution, the inefficient and corrupt state of the government gave colour to his view that its interference could never be ' useful '. Bentham had few readers, but those who read his books made their contents known, and the general trend of his ideas spread widely. Under the combined influence of Bentham and Adam Smith the government felt itself exempt from any responsibility for wrongs that might exist in society, and public opinion acquiesced in this point of view. When the House of Commons refused a request from workers to exercise its ancient right to regulate wages as of old, it was generally considered to be taking the correct view of its position and duties.

The exploited might well expect that if Parliament threw on to them the responsibility for shaping their own course it would at least allow them every opportunity of practising the ' self-help ' and ' individual enterprise '

advocated. But here Parliament saw fit to interfere; Adam Smith had made the doctrine of *laissez-faire* cover this point, but this part of his teaching Parliament ignored. Enlightened self-interest suggested to the workmen that the weakness of the individual should be overcome by combination, and that 'collective bargaining' about wages would do for them what Parliament refused to do. To prevent this, Combination Acts were passed in 1799 and 1800, making strikes a criminal offence, combination a 'conspiracy', and the mere formation of a trade union a crime punishable by imprisonment or transportation.

Industrial methods of 'self-help' were thus closed to the workers, while the peculiar system of electing Parliament cut them off from political power. In the hour of their greatest need the workers might use neither strike nor vote to help them. Governed by one class, the landowners, to whom they were 'the swinish multitude', and employed by another class, who recognized no tie beyond the 'cash-nexus', their point of view had small chance of consideration. Their political exclusion had its social counterpart, summed up in the phrase, 'God bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations.' This attitude of the governing class to the governed received its clearest illustration whenever proposals for educating the children of the workers came under discussion. Education, it was protested, 'would teach them to despise their lot, instead of making them good servants of agriculture and other pursuits to which their rank in society destines them'. Moved by some appalling instance of ignorance, such as that of the girl who told a Commission, 'I be a reg'lar born Christian . . . and Thomas is going to take it up when he's out of work . . . and already he believes in our Lord and Saviour Pontius Pilate and in Moses, Goliath, and the rest of the Apostles,' they allowed that working children ought to be taught to read the Bible, but they would permit nothing beyond that.

Every aspect of this attitude was combated by Cobbett,

Owen, Place, Shaftesbury, Cobden, and Bright. United in the belief that all the political and social wrongs were curable, they differed in their views of which wrongs most urgently called for redress, and of the means by which redress was to be secured. Cobbett, Owen, and Place did their work mainly before the reform of Parliament in 1832, the others after it. Shaftesbury was first and last a philanthropist ; Cobden and Bright he looked on as ' my most bitter enemies ', since they aimed, not at humanitarian reforms, but at securing abundant and cheap food for the masses by means of Free Trade. Bright was at one with Cobbett and Place in thinking that the first step to other reforms was to ' make the working man master of his own destiny ' by giving him a vote. Owen was busy providing an alternative organization of society which should distribute the benefits of industrialism impartially all over the nation.

The motives which inspired these reformers to shun delights and live laborious days would seem, in one way, to have been as varied as their temperaments. Yet the apparent diversity can be seen to represent only two types of inspiration, each illustrating a point of view traceable throughout every sphere of public affairs during the first half of the nineteenth century. Owen and Shaftesbury thought it the duty of the community to use its power to secure the welfare of all its members, Shaftesbury wishing to use the State as his agent, while Owen believed that communal or socialistic action alone would achieve the aim. Place, on the other hand, wholly, and Cobden and Bright in part, deprecated authoritative and collective action, believing in the duty and power of the individual to work out his own salvation.

This point of view, which inspired a series of reforms, is derived, oddly enough, from that same Utilitarianism which was responsible for the general reluctance to change things. The popular version of Bentham's creed was limited to the *laissez-faire* items in it. But real Benthamism included much more and contained a call to action which roused many of the agitators of these

years and was one of the strongest influences making for reform, even where the reformers were unaware of the source of their inspiration. The life of Bentham himself was as far removed from that of an agitator as can be imagined. He passed his days in his study 'codifying like any dragon', refusing to meet anyone but a select few disciples, varying his work with battledore and shuttlecock, and 'postprandial circumgyrations' taken in the sole company of his walking stick 'Dapple'. When he was told that a distinguished stranger had sent a message that he desired to see Mr. Bentham, he returned the answer that Mr. Bentham did not desire to see Mr. X. But his was the greatest single influence at work, in bringing about the long series of reforms that marked the years between 1820 and 1850.

Bentham prescribed a 'double dose of liberty' for the national diseases, but to him liberty meant more than 'letting alone'. To secure liberty in every sense might mean strenuous exertion; shackles on freedom had to be removed, inefficient institutions overhauled and restrictive legislation repealed. While, therefore, the vague 'public opinion' was grounded on the passive side of Utilitarianism, reformers found their inspiration in its active side. Efficiency demanded a new method of governing towns, and so inspired the Municipal Corporations Act. A New Poor Law was needed to spur the individual on to that effort on his own behalf which alone could save him. Parliament must be reformed so as to give the greatest number that share in government which was essential to securing the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Education must equip every man with that 'enlightenment' necessary to the proper working of his 'self-interest'. It is, in fact, clear, that any creed which can apply an exacting test to all parts of any governmental system will provide would-be reformers with a formidable programme of changes. The stimulus administered to reform by Bentham was very great, because his tests of 'Utility' and the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' suggested how very far short of

any satisfactory standard the English system fell. A body of personal admirers like Place and Chadwick (the leader of the movement for Public Health measures) devoted themselves to putting these ideas into practice and formed a small political party known as the 'Philosophic Radicals'. But these direct followers only account for part of Bentham's influence; he had given an inclination towards reforms to a far wider circle, thereby creating an atmosphere favourable to reform. There was something sensible and reassuring about his catch-words, which enabled them to make their way into the minds of many who were normally suspicious of change. What was known of Bentham himself, too, gave men confidence in his ideas; he had money, he was no revolutionary firebrand, he was not even a working man, and so his reforming ideas gained ready admittance to many minds.

While Bentham influenced public opinion in the direction of 'let-be', and inspired reformers in the opposite direction to agitate for change, he also affected the method by which all reforms came to be carried out, whether the reforms were the work of Benthamites or not. To be 'useful' legislation must be based on accurate knowledge, and the influence of the Utility test was illustrated by the ever-increasing number of Inquiries and Commissions which preceded legislation. That this preliminary to action was a novelty is shown by the ridicule cast on the frequency of Commissions by Sidney Smith in 1839, when he exclaims that 'the whole earth is in commission'. A similar Benthamite influence can be seen in the growth of interest in figures and statistical calculations of all sorts. The census, the beginning of the registration of births, deaths and their causes, and marriages by a State registrar, are all part of the Benthamite passion for exact knowledge and the scientific desire to find the exact legislative cure for the disease.

Agitators who found their inspiration elsewhere than in the teachings of Bentham were mostly moved by feelings of humanity or religion, or both. The Evangelical

party in the Church of England gave Wilberforce and most of his fellow-workers to the cause of the slaves, and Lord Shaftesbury to the cause of factory children and many other classes of unfortunates. Evangelicals and free-thinking Philosophic Radicals alike carried through reforms that helped to bring the country out of the troublous state in which she found herself after the French wars, but there was opposition rather than co-operation between the two bodies. Benthamites mistrusted all State action, and philanthropists appealed to the State; philanthropists considered Benthamites heartless and ready to sacrifice human needs to a theory. Nearly all these six agitators had, at some moment, disparaging things to say of each other, except Cobden and Bright. But all were, at bottom, working for the good of the people, and the cause of reform advanced along a wider front because of this diversity of view, even if progress in any particular matter was perhaps hindered.

GENERAL BOOKS

Clapham: *The Early Railway Age.*
Haelvy: *A History of the English People since 1815.*
Knowles: *The Industrial and Commercial Revolutions in Great Britain during the Nineteenth Century.*
Leslie Stephen: *The English Utilitarians,* Vol. I.

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM COBBETT

1762–1835

WILLIAM COBBETT was one of the many men who in the closing years of the eighteenth century rose from humble beginnings to positions of great influence. Grandson of a farm labourer, son of a small farmer and innkeeper, he entered on the serious business of wage-earning when he was so small that he could hardly scramble over the stiles on his way to the fields where he scared rooks from the crops. His whole education was given by an old woman who failed to teach him his letters, and by his father, who taught him to read and calculate in the evenings when both had finished work. And yet it is as a writer that Cobbett is best known to-day ; the man who began life as an uneducated little rook-scarer, who worked hard at other things all his days, who became famous in manhood as a leader of the working classes, left behind him writings remarkable both for quantity and quality.

Cobbett was a countryman first and last : ' Born in a farmhouse, bred up at a plough tail, with a smock frock on my back, taking great delight in all the pursuits of farmers,' he kept the love of country things all his life, and though, like Owen, he was a figure in the Industrial Revolution, he moved in it more as a ghost from disappearing Rural England. He had little interest in the new world ; machines, factories, towns were to him so many monsters making hideous the rural world that he knew and understood. His part in politics was to try to save the old village life from being sucked into the new industrial whirlpool, the village labourer from losing his old independence, from being driven off the land into the

miseries of the factory. His determination, ' A farmer I will live and die,' was combined with a desire to help the weaker peasant to keep his foothold on the soil, and the two aims were not easily worked out together. He had a farm of his own for a large part of his life, certainly, but his political work forced him to pass more time in London, ' the Wen of Wens ', than on his farms, and to spend more of his energies in writing, publishing, and bookselling than in farming.

It was this rural bent, this understanding of the peasant, and realization of what the Industrial Revolution meant to the country dwellers that set Cobbett aside from the others who sought to stay or guide the course of the changes. As a working-class leader Cobbett inevitably came into touch with town workers too, and later he joined forces with factory agitators, trade unionists, and Radicals ; but it was as the spokesman of the dumb country-folk that his greatest work was done. Even his appearance suited his part : a contemporary says he would have taken him ' for a gentleman farming his own estate. He seemed to have that kind of self-possession and ease, with a certain bantering jollity . . . portly, with a fresh, clear, round cheek and small grey eye, twinkling with good-humoured archness . . . the representative of what he always wished to be—an English farmer '. Every one who writes about him notes the singular aptness by which the inn at Farnham, where he was born, was called ' The Jolly Farmer '.

The material for writing his life is provided by Cobbett's own writings. *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine* is deliberately autobiographical ; but everything he wrote is alive with his deeds, thoughts, words, and personality. He had no modesty about himself and took no trouble to disguise the interest which he found in all his own experiences. Every detail is set down on paper ; every one of the hundred volumes is full of the man. He does not write a book on his career, but there is nothing in his career that we do not know after reading even a small part of all he wrote. When he writes a book of ' advice

to young men ' he finds it necessary to start with a short account of his life, in order to show how well qualified he is to give advice to young men, and the bulk of the advice consists of accounts of how William Cobbett met the various calls of a young man's life. When he publishes a description of his residence in America it is as much a description of Cobbett as of America; and even when writing for Americans his own childhood keeps breaking in. When he sets out to give a picture of the condition of rural England it is the mixture of rural England with Cobbett that constitutes the peculiar charm of his *Rural Rides*.

Cobbett once came across a woman who had never been more than two and a half miles from her home, and he burst forth into praise of the wisdom of staying still, declaring himself ' convinced that the facilities which now exist of moving human bodies from place to place are the curse of the country, the destroyer of industry, of morals and, of course, of happiness '. He was the last man from whom such a view might be expected, and, if such was really his principle, his practice was little affected by it. Restlessness was the keynote of his whole life : a man who was at different times gardener, clerk, soldier, journalist, stationer, bookseller, Tory writer for the Government, Radical writer against the Government, Radical agitator, author, and Member of Parliament, and who three times crossed the Atlantic, can hardly be considered to have set an example of staying still. Feverish activity, of body and mind alike, marked the whole of his life.

This restlessness showed itself from his earliest days, and the history of Cobbett's life in his first twenty-five years is that of a series of escapes from one way of life to another. The small rook-scarer who ' first trudged afield with my wooden bottle and satchel swung over my shoulders ' advanced to garden boy ; but while he was developing an undying love of country life, its joys did not content him, and, fired by stories of the glory of Kew, he made the first of his escapes and set off to London, actually finding work at Kew. His curiosity satisfied, he

went back to Farnham ; but soon the first sight of the sea provided a fresh motive for running away. ' No sooner did I behold it than I wished to be a sailor . . . my heart was inflated with national pride.' Thwarted in this desire by a naval officer at Portsmouth, ' I returned once more to the plough, but I was spoiled for a farmer ', even ' the singing of the birds grew insipid '. So for the third time ' the farmer spoiled ' ran away, again on a sudden impulse, moved by the sight of the London coach, which passed him as he was on his way to Guildford Fair. In London he found work as a lawyer's clerk, only to realize that this escape had led him into a prison. He expresses his feelings with his usual exaggerated vigour : ' Gracious Heaven ! If I am doomed to be wretched, bury me beneath Iceland snows and let me feed on blubber ; stretch me under the burning line and deny me thy propitious dews ; but save me from the desk of an attorney.' From this prison the way of further escape was suggested by a recruiting poster, and for the next seven years Cobbett was a soldier and out of England with his regiment.

According to Cobbett's account of life in the Army the only good thing in the Army was a young private, under twenty, named William Cobbett. His superiors were ' supreme jackasses ' : knaves, too, who put to their own uses the money that should have been spent on their men and presented dishonest accounts. He, in shining contrast, by his industry, his earnest study of grammar (for which he went short of food, in order to save pennies to buy pens and paper), his early rising and sobriety, won very rapid promotion, and, by the clerical skill acquired in his office days, made himself so indispensable to his officers that they ' resigned all discipline to me and I very freely left them to swagger about '.

This gratifying success, however, did not tempt Cobbett to look on the Army as the sphere of his life work. When his regiment returned to England in 1791 he left it and turned his attention, first to seeking out and marrying the girl with whom he had fallen in love seven years earlier

in New Brunswick, then to bringing charges of corruption against the officers, whose methods he so plainly understood. The first plan was more successful than the second ; the girl, who had not only remained faithful to him for the seven years but had even kept intact the £150 given her by him at parting, became ' the affectionate and courageous mother ' of his large family, the wife of whom he says, ' Love placed the whole of my time at my disposal . . . made me free as air . . . gave me a companion with so much good sense and useful knowledge, so innocent, so just in all her ways, so pure in thought and deed, so disinterested, so generous.' His second project soon involved him in yet another escape, and he sought refuge in France from the hornets' nest which his attack on his officers' corruption was bringing about his ears. France, in the days when the European armies were advancing to put down the French Revolution and the maddened Paris mob was taking vengeance on the King, was not a good place of refuge, and Cobbett quickly sought a more distant safety in America.

Looking back over this series of escapes, which form the landmarks of Cobbett's early career, we see that each had some share in forming the man. Trudging to Kew, at the age of eleven, in smock frock and red garters, his eye fell on a book in a shop window. Captivated by its odd title, *Tale of a Tub*, he bought it with the threepence set aside for his supper, and, as he sat spellbound under a haystack, reading it, the genius of Swift opened to him a new world and first stirred in the country lad the intellectual and literary powers that were to form an important part of his being in days to come. His attempt to join the Navy aroused love of his country in him ; his distasteful experience of ' quill driving ' brought home to him the drawbacks of being uneducated and drove him to the painful process of self-education that he undertook in the Army. Life in the Army gave him great confidence in his own capacities and roused in him that critical attitude to all authorities that came to be so typical of him. Thus, the Cobbett who landed in America early in 1793

had already developed most of the characteristics that settled the course taken by his later life.

The seven years spent in the New World showed Cobbett the sphere in which his capacities could find the best field for their display. At first he earned a living by teaching English to French refugees, a congenial occupation to one in whom the teaching instinct was always abnormally strong, and who stated frankly, 'To communicate to others the knowledge that I possess has always been my taste and my delight.' But the accidental reading of a certain newspaper article by a pupil soon brought into play an instinct in Cobbett that was even stronger than the taste for teaching—his instinctive capacity for politics and political writing. He first took up his pen to defend the British Government from the attacks of the Americans, who were highly critical of the England whose yoke they had so recently thrown off. An exile from home, Cobbett took it upon himself to defend his country's government against criticism, to tell the grandeurs of the English Constitution, Monarchy, and method of government, so that 'My country, right or wrong' seemed to be the motto of the man who not many years later might be thought to act rather on the maxim, 'My country always wrong'. He wrote under the highly suitable name 'Peter Porcupine', and at once gave an exhibition of his joy in twisting lions' tails, by opening a bookshop with 'a grand exhibition of the portraits of kings, queens, princes, nobles, bishops, in short all that I thought likely to excite rage in the inveterate enemies of Great Britain'. Republican America lashed itself into fury over Porcupine, but on the other side of the Atlantic Cobbett was winning warm approval from the Tory Government, and when, smarting from a heavy fine imposed on him for libel, he left America, in 1800, he found balm for his smart in the gratifying welcome given him by the government. He also solaced himself for the fine of five thousand dollars by writing a 'Farewell to America', which ended: 'With this I depart for my native land, where neither the moth of democracy nor the rust

of Federalism doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal five thousand dollars at a time.' Seven years in the Army had been enough for Cobbett ; seven years in America saw him once more on the move, this time to spend another seven years in varying degrees of adherence to the Tory party that then ruled England.

The Tories, struggling with the greatest war so far known in the history of England and hampered by divisions in their own ranks, welcomed this valuable recruit with flattering dinners and offers of money for running a newspaper. He had, said Windham, leader of one section of the Tories, ' rendered his country services that entitled him to a statue of gold ' ; the pen that was so opportune in America could be even more useful at home. The government was having difficulty in prosecuting the war further, and the man who kept his windows conspicuously dark on the night when London was illuminated to celebrate peace negotiations might give invaluable help in persuading the nation that peace was a mirage until Napoleon was beaten to his knees.

Cobbett would not be tied by taking government money, but he began his famous *Political Register* with the purpose of supporting the government and the war. This paper was one of Cobbett's greatest achievements and is closely bound up with every stage of his public career. The *Political Register* was Cobbett and Cobbett was the *Political Register*. It first appeared in 1802 and outlived its creator ; it passed through many forms and changes. Written at first on the side of the government and concerned with foreign affairs, it later became Radical and the foe of the government ; it left foreign affairs for social problems, and adapted its style of writing to an uneducated class of readers. In some crises it was a great power, and was interesting enough to be read with much eagerness even by those most opposed to its politics. It was ' something between a newspaper and a magazine ', giving news like a daily paper but containing serious articles on current topics, like to-day's weeklies. It was expensive, as were all newspapers in days when each copy

had to pay a tax ; but that was not important at first, as it was aimed primarily at readers who could afford 1*s.* 0½*d.* for a paper. The *Register* supported the government, more or less, for its first six years of life ; but as a supporter Cobbett was never very satisfactory, being subject to disconcerting fits of independence. Supporting the Tories, too, had its pitfalls, as there were varieties of Tories. Cobbett always opposed Addington, who was the Tory Prime Minister when the *Register* began, but had a mild liking for Pitt, the real Tory leader. When Pitt once more became Prime Minister, Cobbett found that he disapproved of his government too, but believed that with Pitt and Addington both out of the way he would find what he wanted for the country in the rule of the Windham set, his own particular allies. This hope was at once dashed to the ground. Cobbett set out eagerly to convince his friends of the evils of the existing system, expecting a ready response. His interest in the war had led him to study its effects, to see how it was being paid for, and the results of his inquiries pleased him little. The cost of the war, he found, was falling most heavily on those least able to bear it ; paper money, heavy debt, corrupt contracting, were starving the peasant ; financiers, in the meantime, were making fortunes. It was the duty of the government to regulate these matters. The effects of war, it was true, were new, but the whole system of government bore close inspection equally badly. Incidents like Addington's gift to his ten-year-old son of a nominal post under the government, carrying with it a large salary and no duties, were common. It was also disturbing to find a large number of advertisements in the papers that ran thus :

> A Borough. A gentleman of fortune and respectability will hear of one by applying to X., Red Lion Square, etc.

Experience in an election in 1807 added still further to Cobbett's conviction that there was a great deal wrong in the State ; the open bribery, the voter who declared he

always ' voted for Mr. Most ' made him urge the destruction of the whole ' Pitt system ' and the adoption of a scheme that he had worked out for the salvation of the peasant. The attitude of the Tories to his suggestion made him question whether they were Tories at all in his sense of the word. His Toryism meant love of old England ; his love of country meant a desire to make his country a good one for the mass of people to live in. He hated change, like the Tories, but he looked on the abolition of abuses like corruption as a restoration of the old, not as innovation. When the Tories replied to his challenge that his scheme for the peasant ' would make the peasant saucy ', and made it clear that in their eyes it was midsummer madness to talk of abolishing the system under which they were the chief gainers, the first stage of Cobbett's political career was nearing its end.

The *Political Register* had always played ' The Candid Friend ', and for some time the candour had been growing more and the friendliness less. After 1807 the relations between Cobbett and the government had developed into hostility on the part of Cobbett and extreme irritation on the side of the government. The *Register* was so influential and Cobbett's pen so effective that the government had strong reason for finding means to silence him. Cobbett was alive to the danger : ' I see the fangs of the law open to grasp me,' he said, and at first he walked warily. Caution and self-restraint were, however, beyond his power for long, and in 1809 he walked into the lion's mouth with an article attacking the barbarous flogging of discontented soldiers by hired German troops. The government were able to secure themselves some relief for two years, as Cobbett was sentenced to imprisonment and a crippling fine, which would seriously hamper him even when the two years of prison were over.

The years of prison mark a turning-point in Cobbett's life ; the man who came out in 1812 was not the man who went in. Mr. Chesterton says that the government made a bad mistake when they sent him to prison, but a worse

one when they let him out again. Newgate checked his work at the time, though without stopping it, but he remained a force among the discontented, and his feelings took on much greater violence during the period of imprisonment, with its partial repression. Prison in those days might be much better or much worse than it is to-day, and for Cobbett it was much better. He continued to write, to bring out the *Register*, to keep up with new affairs, to form violent views. He enjoyed visits from his family and from crowds of admirers from all over England, and his work, though limited, was much less seriously hampered than might have been expected. Its worst hardship, in fact, probably lay in his exclusion from the happy family life that he had been enjoying since 1805 on his farm at Botley. However busy, he always gave much time and care to the bringing up of his children, and there, in all the happy conditions of country life, Cobbett had been educating a family on lines meant to turn out useful, working, happy members of society, and in *Advice to Young Men* there are amusing accounts of Cobbett's ways as the Model Parent. Two years is a long period to be shut away from growing children, and Cobbett finds cold comfort in reflecting that domestic joys are unknown to those responsible for shutting him away from them: 'Thus . . . while the ferocious tigers thought I was doomed to incessant mortification and to rage that must extinguish my mental powers I found in my children and their mother delights to which the callous hearts of those tigers were strangers.'

From Newgate Cobbett carried on the farm through letters and through visits from his children, encouraging the children to learn to write, to keep accounts, and to learn practical affairs. The outside world was disturbed by a new form of popular violence in these years. The poor, finding food still scarcer and dearer owing to Napoleon's attempt to cut us off from continental trade, and themselves unemployed because of the new machines, showed their sufferings by burning the ricks and smashing the machines. Cobbett had long felt for the rural worker,

and now the news that reached him in prison of the sad state of the weavers and other town workers widened his sympathies, while imprisonment did not lessen his outspokenness in offering advice to the Government : ' Measures ought to be adopted, not so much for putting an end to the riots, as to prevent the misery from which they arise.' Money, he said, would be more profitably spent on feeding the rioters than on troops for suppressing them. Prisoners are not in the best position for getting advice accepted, and the poor continued to meet with punishment instead of assistance.

The first three years of Cobbett's renewed freedom were fairly quiet, partly because he had to pick up some dropped threads and partly because his ideas and interests were not those of most vital concern in the time which saw the twenty-two years of war drawing to their close. Peace was the one and only topic of national interest, and as long as war lasted the hand of the government was too weighty for the discontented to hope for relief. A man newly out of prison, too, is apt to feel the need of caution, and to avoid dangerous subjects. From 1812 to 1815, then, the *Political Register* was mainly concerned with the question of peace, and none rejoiced more at the downfall of Napoleon than Cobbett : ' The bugbear is gone, the hobgoblin is destroyed,' he exulted. But his reasons for exulting were not those of the government ; he rejoiced in the ending of war because it gave him the chance of attacking the enemy at home. He hated tax-gatherers and that whole system of political corruption which he called ' the Thing ' far worse than any foreign foe, and, now war was over, attacks on these ills and plans for relief of the poor could no longer be condemned as unpatriotic nor punished as sedition. Since the outbreak of the French Revolution Parliament had refused to consider reforms on the grounds that ' we do not repair our house in the hurricane season '. The hurricane was now over, and so the repairing might be safely undertaken, Cobbett thought. The time had come, and Cobbett was prepared. His *Register* had made itself a power in the

land as early as 1807. Since that time Cobbett had clarified his ideas; he knew what he wanted, he had a strong following among the workers, and he had learnt how best to wield a pen that was indeed mightier than most swords. The consequence was that in the years following Waterloo Cobbett leapt into the forefront of events.

The peace which had been so greatly longed for proved as disappointing as most peaces. The hurricane was over but the weather continued surprisingly unchanged; the peace that was to bring plenty seemed little different from the war that had brought poverty. Discontent seethed up afresh, expressed fruitlessly in rick burning and machine smashing, and all the discontented elements now found a spokesman in Cobbett. His pet topics were now those that interested every one; the popularity of the *Register* went up by leaps and bounds till its circulation reached the record-breaking number of forty thousand copies each week. Its readers were of various types: 'Even those he abuses read him,' one contemporary says. Another described how 'whatever a man's talents, whatever a man's opinions, he sought the *Register* on the day of its appearance with eagerness'. This was a remarkable achievement in days when newspaper reading was not the confirmed habit that it is to-day, and when newspapers consisted of serious political articles without all the devices of headlines and short paragraphs which now help the wandering interest; when, too, a large proportion of Cobbett's admirers were uneducated men to whom reading was a mystery or at best a laborious business, only carried on with the help of many combined intellects. For it was at the working classes that the *Register* was mainly aimed and to them that Cobbett adapted his style. His articles were meant to educate and inform them, to make them think, to see the causes of the ills that they felt without understanding, to wean them from the violence that only gave the government a chance of silencing them ever more effectually. The gospel that the *Register* taught was that a reform of Parliament was the only cure

for their ills, and that the way to get this was by peaceful agitation and organization.

To put his paper within the means of the class for which it was intended Cobbett had to find a way of getting round the newspaper tax, which brought the price up to a shilling a copy; it was not enough that workers joined together in clubs and bought a copy among them, one reading it aloud to them in a public-house. 'We must make it travel faster,' said Cobbett. This was done by issuing two sorts of *Registers*: the old expensive one, stamped, and containing news as well as articles, with a new one, which had no news and so need pay no tax, and therefore could be sold at twopence, but which contained the same articles as the expensive *Register* and was practically as valuable to the poorer readers, who wanted to hear Cobbett's views rather than the news of the day. This 'Twopenny Trash' as its critics called it, found its way into the homes of a vast number of factory workers, and every copy had many readers or hearers. Cobbett became a household name in scattered villages, in mining towns, in every district where workers met together and complained of the evils of their lot. The clear increase in the power of the workers to think for themselves that appeared after the war was to a great extent the result of Cobbett's influence, helped on by the hard teachings of experience.

The *Registers* were not only read, they were acted upon. A Radical weaver, in close touch with working-class affairs, says: 'Their influence was speedily visible. Instead of riots and destruction of property, Hampden Clubs were now established. Cobbett's books were reprinted in cheap form . . . the labourers read them and henceforth became deliberate and systematic in their proceedings.' In Bamford's eyes the influence of Cobbett was thus evidently on the side of peace, and it is here that Cobbett's great importance as a leader of the working classes lies. His words were often wild, his style violent and blustering, but his advice was moderate and peaceful. As Mr. Chesterton points out, he urged the most moderate

policy in the most immoderate language, and his enemies, observing only the wildness of his words, were able to charge him with inflaming the people, when his counsel was actually quietening them. His work in these few years was twofold ; he had to educate his readers in the idea that to work for a reform of Parliament was their first duty, and at the same time to wean them from the methods of blind violence which were their natural reaction to their sufferings. ' The House of Commons must be made subject to the nation ' ; this was the first lesson to be learnt. The second lesson was published in a ' Letter to the Luddites ', where Cobbett points out that an armed government will always have the advantage in a struggle with rioters, and that the wisest policy is to keep clear of machine breaking and all violence so as to give the government no opportunity of riveting the yoke still more firmly on the necks of the workers. This letter, says Cobbett, ' set the whole town in a buzz '. While pushing them on to great exertions in one direction and holding them back in another, Cobbett was also concerned to rouse their spirits and hope. Despair was very near them, and despairing men achieve little ; self-confidence was always encouraged by Cobbett. In another ' letter ', this time addressed to the ' Journeymen ', he tries to rouse their pride. Look, he says, at ' the elegant dresses, superb furniture, stately buildings, fine roads, stout ships, warehouses teeming goods. But all these spring from LABOUR. . . . With this correct idea of your own worth in your minds, with what indignation do you hear yourselves called " Rabble, Mob, Swinish Multitude " '.

Cobbett's influence, though great, was not strong enough to keep the people as quiet as was necessary to avoid the unwelcome attentions of a government still ready to see revolution in all expression of discontent. In 1817 the government struck hard, provoked by riots, Radical meetings, and ' demonstrations ' of the unemployed. Meetings were made almost impossible, free speech in newspapers was much restricted, and the

suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act meant that anyone suspected might be arrested and kept in prison without trial. Cobbett, fresh from prison and knowing that prison was not the best place from which to carry on his work acted on the principle that :

> He who is in battle slain
> Cannot come to fight again ;
> He who fights and runs away
> May live to fight another day.

' My choice,' he declared, ' lies between silence and retreat,' and he unostentatiously withdrew to America once more.

The Atlantic, like Newgate, limited Cobbett's activities less than might have been expected. The *Register* continued to appear ; his zealous preaching of Reform was unmoderated by distance ; he even accepted an invitation to stand as candidate in the next election. His eyes were always fixed on the English side of the Atlantic, and while on his last visit to America he had used his pen in painting the glories of all things English, now he enjoyed himself in picking up fresh sticks with which to pelt the English Government : ' To see a free country once more, to see every labourer with plenty to eat and drink. Think of that ! And never to see the hangdog face of the tax-gatherer ! Think of that ! ' Most interesting of all, out of the hurly-burly of political strife, Cobbett found time to write articles and books of more permanent value than the journalism on day to day topics that had so far occupied his pen. His first book to bring him fame was *A Grammar of the English Language.* This may seem a strange venture for a political agitator, but there was method in Cobbett, as well as the itch of the born schoolmaster to instruct. Barred from directly educating the worker in the method of agitation, Cobbett proposed to fill in the interval by instructing him in the art of learning to think clearly and speak exactly, so putting him more on a level with the educated classes against whom he had to wage his fight. A grammar written by Cobbett was, needless to say, unlike one written

by anyone else. It has many points in common with the dictionary written by Dr. Johnson, Cobbett, like Johnson, missing no chance of having a thrust at his enemies. His list of ' nouns of multitude ' runs thus : ' Mob, Parliament, Rabble, House of Commons, Regiment, Court of King's Bench, Den of Thieves.' To illustrate the intricacies of sentences containing singular and plural nouns, he concocts the following : ' We may say " the gang of borough tyrants IS cruel," or " the gang of borough tyrants ARE cruel," but if we wish to go on to speak of their notoriously brutal ignorance we must not say " the gang of borough tyrants IS cruel and ARE notoriously as ignorant as brutes." ' As writers of Greek grammars try to insinuate knowledge of fine passages of Greek literature by using them as illustrations, so Cobbett's taught a good deal besides grammar ; possibly the spicy prejudices inserted by the way were partly responsible for the enormous numbers of the book that were sold. Cobbett looked on a knowledge of grammar as the first essential for a man who hoped to influence affairs by word or pen ; it was, he complacently observes, his own mastery of it which enabled him to ' convey upon numerous subjects information and instruction to millions now, and provide a store for millions yet unborn '.

Two years in America passed quietly away, but as the worst of the repression in England appeared to be over, late in 1819 he returned, prefacing his arrival with one of those absurdities possible only to Cobbett. When his baggage went through the Customs at Liverpool there was among it a curious long box. Called upon to declare its contents, Cobbett electrified his hearers by stating solemnly, ' These are the bones of Thomas Paine.' Paine, a Radical in the days of Cobbett's Toryism, had been the victim of furious attacks from him ; Cobbett, a Radical now himself, sought to make amends for past injustice by removing Paine's bones from the unhallowed ground allotted to him in America as an atheist, to an honoured tomb in England. The incident, ludicrous from the start, became discreditable to Cobbett in its later stages ;

he lost interest in the bones, failed to raise money for the memorial, and finally they were seized among the effects of a bankrupt son.

The sensation caused by Cobbett at the Customs was equalled by the sensation that his unwelcome return caused the government. The temporary quietening in the country which had lulled the government and encouraged Cobbett to leave America had ended abruptly just before he landed. In the 'Battle of Peterloo' a mass meeting of working-class sufferers intended for drawing up a petition to Parliament had been attacked by the militia; blood had been shed and the government, in a panic, went even beyond their measures of 1817 in repressing all expression of discontent. Within a few months the 'Six Acts' so often mentioned in Cobbett's writings were put into force, making it almost impossible for the voteless to voice their grievances either in meetings or on paper. Cobbett's device of the cheap *Register* was made illegal by the new laws; any weekly paper sold for less than sixpence or containing less than two sheets was now to count as a newspaper and so become liable to a tax of fourpence on each copy, so that once more the *Register* would be too dear for the workers to buy. This led to a change in both his private life and his public work. The loss of profit from the *Register* brought his financial affairs to a long-impending crisis, and the further expenses of an election, followed by a libel case, put Cobbett into the Bankruptcy Court and led to the sale of his beloved farm. Cobbett, it may be remarked, seemed born to financial failure and to quarrels as the sparks fly upward. Most of his business transactions brought him nothing but a horde of creditors, he was constantly involved in libel suits, and almost every political friendship ended in a quarrel. His work was obviously affected by the Newspaper Law, since he was cut off from his ordinary method of writing.

The next ten years of Cobbett's life proved less restless and varied than the preceding years. He steadily educated the country in the need for Parliamentary Reform; he wrote, he toured the country-side so as to get

into touch with every class and to show landlords, farmers, and labourers alike that their interests were all the same. Gagging Acts proved no more effective in stilling Cobbett's voice than had prison or exile. The *Register* continued to appear for those who could afford it. Cobbett set out on his ' Rural Rides ', stopping here and there, talking freely with everybody: ' Hearing what gentlemen-farmers, tradesmen, journeymen, labourers, women, girls, and boys have to say, observing all that passes, and, especially, if your manner be such as to remove all reserve from every class, at the end of a trip like this you get impressed upon your mind a true picture, not only of the state of the country but of the state of people's minds.'

While making himself known to the rural dwellers like this, Cobbett also made the rural people known to the nation by first writing down all he saw in the *Register*, then collecting his articles into a book called *Rural Rides*. He also wrote a variety of books to help the people: *Cottage Economy* to teach the poor labourers' wives to make the best of their scanty means until they got relief; *Monthly Sermons* to keep up their morals in the disheartening conditions of their life. Cobbett was not the man to do nothing because he could not do the thing he would; the business of securing votes for the working man was slow, but he could do lesser things for him while working steadily for the greater good. His *Cottage Economy* and *Advice to Young Men* are amusingly typical both of Cobbett's readiness to ' do the work that's nearest ' and of his serene confidence in his ability to instruct people in their own business. Among the practical advice to the cottager on how to bake and brew, to keep pigs and bees, are embedded deeper matters. He preaches the supreme virtue of work and independence; he strives against the doctrine of resignation: ' I despise the man who is poor and contented . . . it is the enemy of all industry, all love of independence.' He sets forth a wise plan for leading children to want to turn to book-learning by making them feel the need of it in their happy, practical work with animals and country things.

The raging agitator, the dread of governments, could use his pen as well in describing the merits of the pig as in attacking the character of Sidmouth. 'A couple of flitches of bacon are worth fifty thousand tracts and sermons. The sight of them upon the rack . . . tends to keep a man from stealing and poaching, they are great softeners of the temper and promoters of domestic harmony.' The wild word-flinger whose bad language, as Mr. Chesterton puts it, is so particularly good, can be sober enough and accurate enough in telling the best way to save pennies.

One steadfast aim lay behind all his writing—to secure a good life for the labouring class, who were losing the power to help themselves in the bewildering changes through which they were living. 'I want to see the poor men of England what the poor men of England were when I was a boy.' We want nothing new, he explains: only a return to the state of things when there were no land speculators, ousting the native landlords, foreigners to traditional ways; no war profiteers; no borough-mongers, ruling the country for their own benefit; no 'old clothes men', grabbing all the gain from the machine age. 'What,' he asks, 'is the object of government? To cause men to live happily.' Moreover, good government 'means a state of things in which the main body are well fed and well clothed'. Cobbett did not love his land 'with love far brought from out the storied past', but with a practical love, bent on securing 'the greatest good of the greatest number' (though nothing would have induced him to borrow that phrase of the hated Bentham to describe his desire). This aim, though peculiar to him, brought him at last into line with other groups wanting reforms. Radicals of the ordinary sort, and Bentham's followers, all wanted Reform of Parliament, and as that was Cobbett's first step to the things which the others did not want, he found it advisable to join forces with them. Benthamites moved him to fury because they were untouched by the wrongs of the labourer, and only worked to secure him a vote on the abstract grounds that the

best state was that in which each man had a share in the things that concerned him. They, on their side, called him ' a vile rascal ', and declared that his ' malevolence and lying were beyond anything '. But the men of theories and the man of sympathies found it wise to sink their differences for the moment.

Cobbett's position in these years, 1820–30, was sounder and broader based than his earlier spell of prominence in 1816. His light burned with a less dazzling but a steadier flame. He had a programme, Reform of Parliament. He had an ultimate aim which was to be secured through this reform. He spoke for the oppressed in town and country alike. His books on practical matters were making him a household name in many remote hamlets ; he was working in concert with Radicals. Finally, a perfectly irrelevant matter had helped to give him the recognized leadership of the working-class Radicals. In 1820 George IV ascended the throne, and his matrimonial troubles, long the scandal of the country, became a problem of national importance. Parliament refused to recognize the Queen's position, left her out of the Coronation ceremony and set up an investigation with the purpose of divorcing her from the King. The foes of the government naturally went to the help of the Queen, who was attacked by the government, and the Radicals took up her cause. Cobbett threw himself into her defence, and his zealous work brought him into contact with a much wider circle of working-class politicians than had hitherto known him.

The accession of George IV had influenced Cobbett's career, and so did his death. In those days a new king involved a new Parliament, and at the general election following the king's death the question of Parliamentary Reform, for various reasons, came to the fore. Cobbett was never one to miss the tide in affairs. George IV died on June 26th, and on July 1st Cobbett brought out a new cheap paper to push the cause of Reform of Parliament. Now was the hour when he hoped to reap the harvest that he had been sowing for more than twenty years.

The paper took as its name the taunting title flung at the old twopenny *Register, Twopenny Trash,* and it could appear only monthly because of the tax ; but it did much to make Cobbett's views known, and was supplemented by cheap reissues of the articles in the *Weekly Register* as pamphlets, so that Cobbett's voice was once more heard through most of the land. Cobbett was as prompt at drawing arguments from the revolutions that broke out in France and Belgium at this time as he had been in seeing the chance offered by a new reign. He found a twofold moral in these foreign uprisings ; to the government he pointed out what happened to governors who refused remedy to abuses ; the working-class reformers he bade note that revolutions ' were accomplished not by gentry with whiskers or long spurs ' but by ordinary men.

From 1830 to 1832 the many currents of Reform feeling began to flow into one channel and swelled to a flood formidable enough to frighten the opponents of Reform. In consequence the position of Cobbett changed in these years. Now he was only one of many, and the voice which for years had been something of a voice crying in the wilderness was now only one of a chorus. He played an important part in this last stage of the long struggle, but his most valuable work had been done in earlier years. Many leaders were guiding the nation in this crisis, and Cobbett was not the most important among them, though his work in the past had prepared the way for 1832. His activity almost outdid that of earlier days ; his untiring pen and tongue turned out wares suited to all classes of readers, landlord and tenant, capitalist and workman, farmer and labourer. He worked out a ' Plan of Reform ' which could be used as a definite objective for the efforts of reformers ; he wrote on every aspect of the matter week by week ; he strove to call forth the voice of the nation. Soon the gale of popular opinion blew high and Cobbett and all reformers were faced with the delicate task of riding the storm that they had raised. While the agitation must be enough to coerce Parliament it must not be enough to scare off the moderate friends of Reform.

The degree of reform offered by the Whig Government, when it came, was only a sorry shadow of Cobbett's ' Plan ', which the reformers had adopted as their aim. The inevitable problem arose : Was it better to take what was offered, poor though it was, or to stand out for more, at the risk of losing even the small mercy now offered ? Cobbett at least knew that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush ; expediency rather than consistency was always his guide through life, and he now transferred his energies to working for the Whig measure instead of standing out for the Radical Plan, as many wished. All through, Cobbett's advice had been for peaceful methods, for hard words, but not for blows, and in the end he held that half a loaf is better than no bread. He much enjoyed pointing out to the government the parallel between the burning of Nottingham Castle and Bristol and the burning of the châteaux in France in 1789, but he did all he could to prevent those burnings from being more than isolated incidents.

Those in authority, however, were convinced that any influence exerted by Cobbett was certain to be a stimulus to violence, and in the midst of the Reform excitement he found himself prosecuted by the government on a charge of ' seditious libel '. This accusation rose out of the ' last Peasants' Revolt ' of 1830, in which the despairing labourers, half starved and wholly pauperized, struck wildly against landlords and their agents, for higher wages. The mysterious ' Captain Swing ', their leader, issued a three years' plan of campaign : ' We will destroy corn stacks and the threshing machine this year, next year we will have a turn with the parsons, and the third year we will go on and make war upon the statesmen.' But the rising never passed beyond its first stage. Troops were sent to crush the rebels, a Special Commission sat to investigate the rising, and executions, transportations and terms of imprisonment proved that Whigs, though reformers, could act as sternly for the protection of property and the maintenance of law and order as the Tories. To complete this display of zeal the Whig

Government instituted legal proceedings against Carlile and Cobbett, on the grounds that they had written articles in the Press which were calculated to incite to a breach of the peace.

In 1831 Cobbett came up for trial at the Guildhall, and showed much skill in turning the occasion into an advertisement of Radical views and an exposure of the folly of the government. He spoke for four hours, prefacing his defence with an ironical plea for indulgence, based on the prosecution's description of him as a 'labourer'; and while the court was crowded a much larger crowd all over the country was following the proceedings with close attention. He read the offending article from the *Weekly Register*, showing that the government had fastened on it an unfair interpretation by detaching it from its context; he read other articles in which he had clearly warned the labourers against violence saying, 'Let every true Englishman . . . think it his duty to bring the wretched incendiaries to justice.' Most effective of all, he summoned several members of the Cabinet to give evidence, including its Lord Chancellor, Brougham, who had to admit that in earlier days he had applied to Cobbett for permission to reprint his 'Letter to the Luddites' because he considered it likely to have a beneficial effect on the minds of the working class. In short, as the trial proceeded it became, it has been said, more like a trial of the government by Cobbett than of Cobbett by the government, and when the jury, after an all-night sitting, failed to reach a conclusion and the case was dismissed, the Whigs must have regretted bitterly that they had not taken Bentham's advice and let Cobbett alone. Cobbett's gains from the government's mistake were considerable; his reputation had been enhanced by his skilful conduct of the affair, he had ventilated the grievances of the labourers and the views of the Radicals in a most effective way, and, by his success, discouraged governments from entering on prosecutions for 'seditious libel' in the future.

The following year the government which had tried to

harm him gave him pleasure by passing into law the Reform Bill. His pleasure, however, was only in the passing of such an Act and not in the terms of this particular Act which gave votes to middle-class townsfolk and to large farmers, but not to one single member of the working classes; despite all their agitation the workers were no more master of their own destinies than before. Some benefits, however, Cobbett found in the Bill. The borough-monger was no more; never again need he go out of his way to avoid 'sinkholes' like Haslemere or Gatton, nor tell the astonished labourer of Old Sarum that it was 'that Accursed Hill' that deprived him of his supper, nor face the 'sneaking looks' by which he swore he could always distinguish the inhabitants of a 'rotten borough'. He was even able to take his seat in the new House of Commons, returned by the votes of the middle-class voters of Oldham. But this new House pleased him little more than the old, so often the butt of his wit; nor, to tell the truth, did Cobbett please the House any better than it pleased him, so that this membership which should have been the climax of his long years of work was more like an anticlimax. Cobbett had always been weak in the power to combine with others, and a man who quarrelled collectively with every society and individually with every colleague with whom he tried to work was unlikely to find Parliament congenial. Parliamentary etiquette was to him so much foolishness; he sat on the Front Bench sacred to Ministers, and his reverence for the Mother of Parliaments was shown in his maiden speech which began: 'It appears to me that since I have been sitting here I have heard a great deal of unprofitable discussion.' When the House was burnt down he made malicious insinuations about 'fire and brimstone from heaven'.

Macaulay, a fellow Member of Parliament, said that 'after Cobbett got into Parliament he was nothing'. This is probably true of his influence, but it leaves out of account the great amount of strenuous work done by Cobbett in the House. Mr. Cole observes that Cobbett

represented chiefly the voteless, and this was no small matter in days when the voteless were the majority of the population. Policy remained unaffected by the efforts of Cobbett and his few fellow Radicals, for policy depends on votes, and the Whigs could count on their four hundred and eighty members ; but even an ineffective protest has its uses. Cobbett fought hard for a ' Ten Hours Day ', and for the ' Dorchester Labourers ' who were transported for seven years for starting a village trade union with meaningless but illegal oaths, and for factory children. The zeal shown in these attempts to secure removal of old abuses was surpassed in his struggle against one of the most important of the Acts of the Reformed Parliament itself, the ' New Poor Law '. Cobbett had pointed out the faults of the old system with vigour, but he thought the new was even worse than the old. It gave grudgingly, as a charity, what he thought was a right to be claimed freely ; it aimed only at reducing the number of paupers and not at lessening the hardship of the poor ; it inflicted immeasurable human suffering. Cobden was one of the originators of the agitation for the repeal of this Act, which was taken up by Dickens, *Punch*, *The Times*, and by many of those who later became Chartists. Illness and then death put a limit to his efforts to undo this ' Bill for coarser food ', as he described it.

In spite of the practical ineffectiveness of much of his work in the House of Commons, he made his real character felt on occasion, and showed that beneath all his rant and bluster there lay a sound good sense which could at times make the arguments of his opponents look absurd. In a debate on the limitation of working hours for children, employers opposed any shortening of hours on the grounds that figures proved that all profits from manufacturing were made in the last hour, and that therefore reduction of hours would mean the disappearance of profits altogether. Cobbett's heart guided him here more truly than the manufacturers were guided by their heads. He rose to congratulate the House on its achievement in making

the discovery hitherto hidden from mankind, that ' far from British supremacy resting on the Navy, the Bank of England, the Land (as earlier ignorant generations had supposed) . . . all are as nothing compared with the labour of 300,000 little girls, nay, of only one-eighth of this 300,000, from whose labour, if we only deduct two hours a day, away go the resources, the power, and the glory of England '.

The Cobbett who lives in memory to-day is, however, not Cobbett the Member of Parliament. It is Cobbett the agitator, the schoolmaster of the working classes, whose ear was attuned to catch and put into words the inarticulate groans of the peasant overwhelmed by change ; the Cobbett of the *Rural Rides*.

Cobbett's work in life was partly that of a heart, partly of a voice. He had the power of feeling with the working classes ; he could picture how events looked through their eyes. While to most people ' Enclosure ' of the old open lands meant simply more and better crops and less waste, Cobbett felt with the man who said ' Before the fields were enclosed I had four cows . . . now I have not even as much as a goose.' Factories might symbolize the great new quantity of things now being created, but Cobbett saw them through the eyes of the hand-worker, starving from the competition of machinery, and of the rural peasant driven into the hateful prison of its life by the loss of his ' by-industry '.

The growth of large towns, though to many a sign of national wealth, was to Cobbett like the spread of some blight over the fair face of England, cutting the masses off from the sights and sounds of country life so healthy to mind as well as body. To Parliament it might appear a glorious thing that England was changing from an agricultural to an industrial country, but Cobbett knew ' by experience, daily observation, minute and repeated personal inquiry, that the labouring man . . . though he never lose a day's work, though he is frugal and industrious, is not now able to procure himself a single meat meal from one end of the year to another '. The tangle

of finance and politics and corruption under which this state of things had come into existence he called contemptuously 'The Thing', 'The Deadweight' on the backs of the poorest.

This power of feeling with people was practical, not sentimental. Like Dr. Johnson, with whom he has so much in common (though he nourished one of his most violent hatreds against 'old Dread Death and Dread Devil Johnson'), he might have said, 'Clear your minds of cant.' He sought to rouse the poor to fury against 'the comforting system', to warn them that they were 'coaxed and threatened with a basin of carrion soup in one hand and a halter in the other'. Independence, not charity, was what he sought for them. His matter-of-fact sense was affronted by proposals to educate the poor: 'Expansion of the mind is all very well, but really the thing that presses most is getting something to expand the body.' And again: 'What education can quiet the gnawings and ragings of hunger?' First things first was Cobbett's rule.

To this heart which felt the woes of others Cobbett joined a voice with which he was able to pass on his feelings. His capacity for making others feel what he told them was of particular value in days before the newspapers kept one half of the world informed how the other half lived. As an informer Cobbett could not be bettered; his ideas, as Hazlitt put it, 'were served up hot and hot'; everything he saw, all he did, all he thought, down it all went on paper, alive, interesting, fluent. He had a genius for expression; he noticed everything and he could make his readers see what he had seen. His pen painted scenes that had caught his eye as he rode on his horse through the country-side: 'The labourers [near Cirencester] seem miserably poor: their dwellings are little better than pig beds and their looks indicate that their food is not nearly equal to that of a pig.' Women did heavy work on the land, and he notes a group who 'presented such an assemblage of rags as I never saw before . . . ragged as colts and pale as ashes, their blue arms and lips would

have made any heart ache, but that of a seat seller or a loan jobber'. He is stung by the contrast between the natural beauty of Leicestershire and the hideous condition in which the dwellers in the fair scenes lived, in 'hovels made of mud and straw . . . their bits of chairs and wretched boards tacked together to serve for a table . . . the floor of broken brick or bare ground'. He heightens his effect by introducing a standard of comparison which shows in its worst light the thing he is describing: 'I never saw human wretchedness to equal this, no, not even amongst the free negroes in America.' Reflecting on the lot of factory workers he bursts forth: 'Talk of serfs, talk of villeins . . . the poor creatures of the "enlightened North" are compelled to work fourteen hours a day in a heat of 84 degrees . . . liable to be punished for looking out of the window.' He finds labels for all the classes that he considered responsible for the disastrous position, 'loan jobbers and old clothes men . . . nabobs, negro drivers', so he calls the new landlords; he hated the manufacturers too, 'Lords of the loom', and financiers, 'cormorants who gorge on the taxes'; the towns that they lived in he called 'Wens', the products of public schools 'frivolous and inefficient idiots'.

Cobbett's voice was the voice of one for many, and its volume was often unpleasing. Like the man in Humpty Dumpty's poem,

> He said it very loud and clear,
> He went and shouted in his ear,

so that at times vividness became coarseness and he was carried away by the noise he made. Macaulay found him so readable that he tells in his diary how he got up at five in the morning to finish one of his writings, but he says that 'prolonged perusal becomes painful', so loud did Cobbett shout at times. Mounted on one of his many hobby-horses, Cobbett galloped away far beyond sense and proportion; facts, figures, history, all were dismissed

as nonsense if they cut across one of Cobbett's theories ; his eyes were more to be relied on than any government census in estimating population ; all previous history was worthless if it were not in accordance with certain views. He brings his big guns to bear on things trivial as well as large ; the farmer ' posing as a gentleman . . . his farm with its carpets . . . a bellpull, a parlour, a sofa . . . eating two or three nicknacks instead of a piece of bacon ', his daughters playing the harpsichord, his sons ' brought up to be clerks or some shiny-dish thing or other ' ; he makes a violent attack on tea-drinking, ' the everlasting dawdling about with the slops of the tea table . . . the expense of the tackle, the time taken from more valuable work to make a fire ' ; all this is bad enough, but he cannot restrain the fury aroused by the thought that all is only to make a drink which he considers ' the destroyer and enfeebler of the frame, the engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, the debaucher of youth and maker of misery for old age . . . and which after a life of misery brings a man to his grave ten to fifteen years before his time '. This exaggerated way of writing achieves, by its absurd lack of proportion, a kind of inverted humour, and is typical of the man.

Side by side with this Cobbett of prejudice and violent tongue there dwelt a Cobbett dowered with a keen sense of the beauties of Nature, as quick to notice shepherds' roses in the hedge, the absence of singing birds in Yorkshire, as he was to notice the signs of misgovernment. At one moment he is heaping every sort of blame on Lord Sidmouth, the next he falls into a tender description of the woodland scenes through which he is passing : ' Even in winter the coppices are beautiful to behold, while they comfort the mind with the idea of shelter and warmth. In spring they change their hue from day to day during two whole months . . . from the first appearance of the delicate leaves to the full expansion of those of the ash ; and even before the leaves come to intercept the view, what is so delightful to behold as the bed of a coppice bespangled with primroses and bluebells ? The opening

of the birch leaves is the signal for the pheasant to begin to crow, for the blackbird to whistle and the thrush to sing; and just when the oak-buds begin to look reddish, and not a day before, the whole tribe of finches burst forth into song from every bough, while the lark, imitating them all, carries the joyous song to the sky.' Cobbett hates towns as much as he loves the country; Oxford's dreaming spires suggest to him only 'the drones that they contain and the wasps they send forth'. Cheltenham he describes as 'half clown, half Cockney . . . the resort of the lame and the lazy, the gormandizing and guzzling'. His taste in natural beauty does not agree at all points with taste to-day; he loved the Downs most of all; but Hindhead and similar favourite heathery spots of to-day he calls 'the most villainously ugly spot created', and vows 'we will have nothing of the rascally fir tribe'. Yet he was one of the earliest admirers of the new type of beauty created in the very ugliness of the industrial world: 'We saw the iron furnaces in all the horrible splendour of their everlasting blaze. Nothing can be conceived more grand or more terrific than the yellow waves of fire that issue from the top of those furnaces.'

It is this variety of his writings, the mingling of pungent personalities with descriptions of beauty, and the character of the man shining clear through it all, that makes his books interesting to read to-day. Most political writing is as dust and ashes within a few years, and Cobbett wrote almost entirely as a means to a political end; yet he is still readable. An egoist, too, does not always make a congenial companion, and Cobbett was the frankest of egoists; he publishes his own high estimate of the value of his work from the house-tops. Passing through Oxford he 'could not help reflecting that what I had written (in the last three weeks) had produced more effect than all that had for a hundred years been written by all the members of this University'. He dwells complacently on the large sales and influence of his books, making the staggering estimate that his *History of the Protestant Reformation* had 'the largest circulation of any

book in the world except the Bible '. His books are full of himself ; when he urges the husband to consider his wife, he drives home the counsel by telling how he always left whatever he was doing when a thunderstorm came on, so that he could run home to his wife, who was nervous in a storm. Even when he is teaching the poor cottager's wife to make rushlights instead of candles, he must put himself in, saying : ' You can see to read the foul lies and libels circulated about me . . . by a rushlight as well as by a taxed candle.' In all his weaknesses the man stands clear to view, and the egoism and the violence are forgotten in the virility, the sincerity, the human interest ; his egoism was not selfish, his life was given up to working for other people, and much of the violence was on behalf of a cause.

In his own day it was as an agitator that Cobbett won fame. He did not accomplish what he wished ; ' Merry England ' had gone for ever, every year more of the old rural England was swallowed up by industry ; machines and towns had come to stay and to encroach ever more ; Cobbett had time against him. Yet his work was not in vain. He made known some of the under side of the ' progress ' which few cared to observe ; he played an effective part in developing early democratic activity. He encouraged and stimulated the class suffering from the changes brought by industrialism ; he goaded them into action, taught them to think out their needs, to organize, to keep their eye on the goal and not waste themselves in futile violence. He spoke to them and for them ; he made their existence a living fact to the minds of the great number of people and politicians who would otherwise have overlooked them altogether.

BOOKS ON COBBETT

E. I. CARLYLE : *Life of William Cobbett.*
G. H. D. COLE : *The Life of William Cobbett.* (Newer).
CHESTERTON : *Cobbett.* (Short, more like an essay.)
FAY : *Life and Labour*, Chapter VIII.
HAMMOND : *Village Labourer.*

COBBETT'S OWN WRITINGS

Rural Rides (*Everyman*, 2 vols.).
Cottage Economy, published at 3*s.* 6*d.* by Peter Davies, Ltd.
Advice to Young Men, do. do.
Selections from Cobbett's Writings, published by Clarendon Press at 3*s.* 6*d* (very useful).
(Cobbett appears in Hudson's *Afoot in England.*)

CHAPTER III

ROBERT OWEN

1771–1858

OWEN and Cobbett must have been something alike in temper: both genial, abounding in life and vigour, both real 'characters', in the sense of being original. They were both 'Gospellers', men with a mission, and, consequently, are probably more entertaining to read about than they were to meet in the flesh. The true missioner knows neither time nor season, and Owen and Cobbett might have said with the Ancient Mariner:

> The moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me;
> To him my tale I teach.

Owen, Macaulay tells us, thought a fancy-dress ball a fitting occasion for lecturing one man for half an hour on the subject of co-operation, and another on 'moral responsibility'. Cobbett could drag an attack on landlords into sermons, grammar book, or *Advice to Young Men* with equal ease. They were, in fact, colossal bores, but bores of a sort that are necessary, since to move the world it is necessary to go on saying the same thing over and over again. Their deepest resemblance lay in their devotion to the public good, in giving up their lives to a cause. And, while they resembled each other in unselfishness of aim, it is curious to note a resemblance in their defects too; they were both difficult to work with, both provokingly sure that they were always right, both impatient of other people's opinions. Strong in the inspiration of their causes, they were both equally strong in their own prejudices.

Alike in some points of character, Cobbett and Owen were widely sundered by their general view of the problems they faced. Cobbett looked back regretfully to ' the good old days ' ; but Owen knew that there was no going back ; he saw the Golden Age ahead, not behind. But, while refusing to join in the laments of Cobbett that all good had gone for ever, Owen also refused to join those who sat helplessly watching the tide as it washed up mingled gold and rubbish, depositing it anywhere, and threatening to obliterate old landmarks.

Many men besides Owen were aware of the evil that accompanied the wonders of the Industrial Revolution ; his peculiarity lay in hearing it as a trumpet-call to vigorous, carefully-concerted action. Bentham and the reformers who took their views from him thought all action futile. Others, less disinterested, suffered from a kind of intoxication. The boundless possibilities of the new machinery made them ' drunk with sight of power ', blinding them to everything else.

Owen shared this appreciation of the gifts brought by the new forces, but he saw that the forces were blind, strong, like natural forces, for evil as well as for good, making big demands on men's energies, if they were to be guided aright. A new England must arise, but it must be shaped and moulded by the efforts of the clear-sighted.

There was a third class of observer—those who lamented the evils but consoled themselves by reflecting that all good things had to be paid for, and that, on balance, the benefits of the Industrial Revolution far outweighed the evils. Owen was not taken in by the fallacy of this ; there is, he saw, no ' compensation ' where it is one set of people who enjoy all the advantages and another who endure all the drawbacks.

Owen's life was spent in protesting against all these views, and in labouring to show how the good of the new industrialism could be enjoyed, while the evil could be abolished. And here lies the chief interest of his career : that, himself a typical product of the Industrial

Revolution, he used the position thus won to attack the system to which he owed his own fortune.

Owen's life, like that of Cobbett, can be written from materials provided by himself. At the end of his long life he wrote an *Autobiography*; he also wrote several accounts of his views, and 'addresses' to bodies of people, from which can be gathered a fairly complete picture of his mind and temper. Like Cobbett, too, he nearly always had a newspaper under his control, and wrote a great deal, though, unfortunately, he had none of Cobbett's merits as a writer.

Owen, like many leaders of men, had an early introduction to the serious business of life, though not so early as Cobbett, since he went to school till he was seven. But at that ripe age he was promoted to assisting to teach others, and there seems something rather ominous here, in that the man who in later life was so much readier to instruct and inform than to admit new ideas himself should have exchanged the role of learner for that of teacher at so early an age as seven. The active life begun thus soon ended only with death, eighty years later.

His precocity did not end with his school life. Serious reading roused in his mind religious doubts, and at the age of ten he 'felt strongly that there must be something fundamentally wrong in all religions'. When he was fourteen, further study brought him 'finally to abandon all belief in every religion taught to man'. In view of this, it is not surprising to learn that, at the age of ten, he grew dissatisfied with Newtown, the quiet country town in Montgomeryshire where his father was a saddler. More surprise may perhaps be felt at hearing that he excelled all his playfellows at dancing and at all sports, and that he was such a universal favourite in the town that even his persistent practising of the clarionet in the street was borne without a complaint.

From ten to eighteen the life of the young Owen presents little of interest. In Stamford, London, and Manchester he pursued a blameless and fortunate course as shopboy

and apprentice in different branches of the drapery trade. The young man of eighteen, like the child of ten, grew tired of the limitations of his position, and with a hundred pounds of borrowed capital this typical figure of his day launched out on the sea of independence.

Owen made this venture in Manchester, in 1789, and with it he became part of the Industrial Revolution. To-day, Manchester and Lancashire stand, in the public mind, for the cotton trade ; the population lies very thickly strewn on the slopes of the Pennines ; through the port of Liverpool passes a vast part of our exports in the form of cotton goods, and of our imports in the form of raw cotton. But the Manchester to which Owen went was not the modern ' Cottonopolis '. Cotton in 1789 was still only an upstart trade in England, barely tolerated, and of small extent. Wool was the traditional basis of English wealth, a source of royal revenue since the days of Edward I. It is a sack of wool on which the Lord Chancellor sits to-day in the House of Lords, it was the demand for wool that made the wealth of the landlord class throughout the centuries ; and the Parliament in which these landlords sat was hardly likely to welcome a new trade whose raw material could not be raised on their lands. Until, therefore, the eighteenth century brought England new colonies, which needed for their market something cooler than our traditional woollen goods, the small trade in ' cotton-wool ' (as it was then called) was kept in check.

But conditions changed. New markets, combined with new inventions, which found a readier reception in a new and unorganized industry than in the old-established woollen trade, began to increase the cotton trade. As inventors made it possible to produce, first a stronger, then a finer thread, cotton goods became increasingly popular ; further inventions made the goods both better and cheaper, and Manchester, which had always been the home of such cotton trade as flourished, entered on a new and exciting stage of its existence.

In coming to Manchester Owen was thus entering into

the very heart of the changes shortly to transform England. He found himself in a new and exhilarating world, offering opportunities which he was not slow to seize. His fortunate apprenticeship to the drapery trade had given him a valuable knowledge of materials and a sound training in business methods, and at the age of eighteen he set up as an independent manufacturer, in a not very satisfactory partnership. His first step to success in the industrial world was taken when he obtained the post of manager in a large cotton-spinning mill. The incident is full of touches characteristic of the man. Mr. Drinkwater, the mill-owner, objected that Owen looked too young for the post for which he was applying; Owen retorted that such an objection might have been justified four years ago, but was most misplaced now that he had reached the age of twenty. Mr. Drinkwater next observed that the salary asked by Owen was as big as the demands of all the other applicants put together; to which Owen replied that as he was making as much as that on his own he considered his services were worth that sum. He was thereupon appointed, and found himself in sole charge of five hundred workpeople, engaged on processes of which he himself was completely ignorant. No situation, however, could disturb Owen's serene self-confidence; and, by looking wise, holding his tongue, and learning from those whom he was supposed to be managing, he tells us that at the end of six weeks he knew his business. In a short time his mill was turning out yarn (stamped with Owen's own name) superior to all other in quality, and eagerly sought by buyers. His employer's satisfaction was shown in the traditional way, by an offer of a partnership in the firm, an offer soon regretted when Drinkwater's daughter fell in love, and he wanted the partnership for his prospective son-in-law.

It was not in business alone that these years saw the transformation of 'the Industrious Apprentice' into a man of established position. Manchester was developing an interesting intellectual life, and Owen was fortunate in coming into contact with a number of thoughtful,

enlightened men. Mixing with them in a kind of ' Study Circle ', he gained an insight into other minds and other ways of thinking, which stimulated his own ideas, and supplied (what he so sadly lacked during most of the later stages of his life) the corrective of equal argument, and the give and take of debate.

Manchester, in fact, made Owen, and when he left it he was well equipped to enter on the work of his life. In this new move the threads of business and romance mingle. The love-affairs of his employer's daughter had brought his connexion with Drinkwater to an end ; his own love-affairs were responsible for the next step in his advance. From among the many offers of partnership which prove the soundness of his reputation he accepted one which took him to Scotland. Here a meeting with the daughter of a well-known mill-owner, Mr. Dale, led to a slow-moving love-affair. After a broad hint from a friend of Miss Dale's, Owen found courage to propose marriage, but was told that he must first win the consent of her father, who was not at all inclined to favour him. Here trade came to Owen's aid ; hearing that Dale wanted to sell his cotton mill, the wily suitor came before Dale, not in the guise of his daughter's lover, but as the possible purchaser of the mills. Owen's firm bought the mill, Owen's abilities impressed Mr. Dale, and in 1800 Owen and his bride took up their new life at New Lanark, where Owen was to manage the mill taken over from Mr. Dale by his firm.

The man was now ready and the scene set. New Lanark was soon to become famous through Europe, and its manager the admiration of governments, business men, and philanthropists. Owen's experience had taught him to manage men, to make money, and to understand the changes that were transforming England. He was known to be one of the best cotton spinners, and one of the leaders along the new industrial ways opening out to men of enterprise. There were, however, other things about Owen that were less well known. Beneath the orthodox career was concealed a good deal of unorthodox reflection. The successful pursuit of wealth had not

ROBERT OWEN

From the bronze bust by Sir W. Goscombe John, R.A., recently presented to the International Labour Office at Geneva

absorbed all his energies ; an independent mind had been playing actively on various problems met with in the years at Manchester, and an original disposition had led to some conclusions that, put into practice at New Lanark, showed Owen in a new light.

Owen was to prove himself a man of theories. He had been forming the theories for some time, and as part owner and sole manager of a large mill he now had a chance to put his ideas into practice. He went to New Lanark, he tells us, ' not only to manage the mills, but to change the conditions of the people '. This, needless to say, was not the view that his partners took of his duties, and twice Owen was forced either to fall in with their views or to buy them out and form a new firm with more congenial ideas. Even his third set of partners, sharing Owen's desire to make the works the scene of a ' social experiment ', could not countenance what they called the ' godlessness ' of his ideas, and after twenty-five years Owen ended his connexion with New Lanark.

New Lanark, built, like many other mills that date from the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, on the banks of a swift stream which provided the motive power, included a good deal more than a mill. Remote from any town, there were no possible workers living on the spot. The mill-owners had to attract workers there, house, feed, and generally provide for them. Thus the mill manager had control over not only the work and the workpeople in their working hours, but also over the artificial town that had to be raised round the mill itself. It was thus that Owen found unrivalled opportunities of testing his theories. New Lanark contained about fifteen hundred people, and the labour of these was supplemented by that of about five hundred pauper children, bought, according to the practice of the day, in batches from the Poor Law officers of some large town. Pauper children and adult workers alike were clearly at the mercy of their employers ; the mills were remote, and the evils that went on unchecked in many of these isolated spots can well be imagined. Mr. Dale, of New Lanark, had always been an

employer who cared for the welfare of those in his keeping, so that the people had been spared much that was suffered elsewhere ; even so, the conditions as reported by Owen were bad enough, and suggest terrible pictures of what conditions must have been in places ruled by less philanthropic employers. Cruel overseers, greedy masters, could work their will ; there was no one to care if the pauper children were worked to death ; no one to know that the hours worked were harmful to health, the conditions under which the people lived harmful to morals. The standard of the workpeople themselves was very low, since the better-class labourer refused to enter these hateful places, unless driven in to escape starvation.

At New Lanark Owen had two things to do : he had to make profits big enough to satisfy his partners, while using his position to experiment in ways of organizing factory life, so that it should benefit workers as well as owners. His work for the first of these objects presents no particular interest. As at Manchester, he was very successful as a cotton spinner ; the profits were made, and the price that he had to pay, when obliged to buy out his partners, is sufficient proof that his management was successful from the purely commercial point of view. The interesting thing was that Owen could make it pay so well, when his methods were contrary to all current ideas of how to make profits.

Modesty was never a characteristic of Owen, nor did he ever take a lowly view of the importance of anything that he carried out. His work at New Lanark he describes as ' the most important experiment in the happiness of the human race that had yet been instituted at any time in any part of the world '. This ' experiment ' consisted in trying to run his mill so as to benefit the workpeople ; and to achieve this end, through the securing of their welfare, moral, mental, and physical, by particular methods. For Owen was a man with a system ; everything that he did was done according to the needs of his system. When he set up schools for all children of his

workpeople, when he abolished the fines by which obedience to factory rules was usually secured, when he improved the workers' quarters and insisted on cleanliness, it was not only because these things were beneficial in themselves; he acted thus because all these things were demanded by his system. It was all part of that all-embracing 'View of Society' which he wanted to set up in place of the existing Society, which had been made out-of-date by new inventions.

For thirteen years (from 1800–1813) Owen was content to put his theories into practice without bothering to state them formally, and not until he thought they were sufficiently proved did he begin to spread his views in Essays and Addresses. It is, however, simpler to formulate them here, before describing the practical work which resulted from the theories.

All men, Owen thought, are what they are, simply and solely as the result of circumstances; each man's character is made for him by the material conditions under which he happens to live and by the education that he receives. 'Man becomes a wild, ferocious savage or a cannibal, or a highly civilized and benevolent being, according to the circumstances he may be placed in at birth.' Starting from this, it will be seen that vast possibilities are opened out. If circumstances make men, regulation of circumstances will produce the sort of man that the regulators want. It is therefore only necessary to find out what sort of change is necessary to produce the best sort of man, for any government to be able to mould its citizens according to its desire. Education and material conditions can be regulated by governments, so that here is a short and ready way of remedying most of the ills that flesh is heir to. Owen claimed nothing less for his discovery than this: that it would, in a very short time, put an end to practically all the troubles which were producing widespread misery at that moment. Owen saw no fallacy in his argument that, on the one hand, man can make circumstances, and, on the other, that circumstances can make man.

The view of his duties taken by a works manager who held a creed like this was bound to be extensive; his methods, too, were likely to run counter to ordinary methods. If the same man might be made into a cannibal or a civilized being, merely by circumstances, then it was a duty to see that the human beings that fell to his care had the sort of conditions that would turn out a civilized being rather than a savage. Owen therefore gave great attention to improving the houses of his men, to insisting on more cleanliness in houses and in streets (though his good intentions were not appreciated, and called forth the taunt, 'bug-hunter', from his ungrateful workmen). Good stores, where they could lay out their wages to the best advantage, savings banks, free doctoring, all such benefits Owen's theory caused him to provide for the men at New Lanark. His management of men and methods of maintaining the discipline necessary in factory life, were likewise unusual. Owen believed that no one is responsible for the formation of his own character; neither praise nor blame, therefore, should be given to anyone, since virtues and defects are due to circumstances alone. The usual fines for men, and beatings for children, had no place in Owen's scheme. Since man becomes lazy or dishonest through circumstances, Owen's first care was to make circumstances offer as few temptations as possible. Theft was made difficult by a system of checking which made discovery almost certain, and dishonesty grew rare. The greatest source of his pride was his 'Silent Monitor' and to this odd device he attributed most of the undoubted improvement in conduct and character that followed the first years of his life at New Lanark. The Silent Monitor was a four-sided block of wood; each side was a different colour, and one was hung up near each workman with that side outward which, in the opinion of the foreman, indicated by its colour the shade of the man's conduct during the previous day. Owen tells with much satisfaction how when he first started the plan most of the Monitors registered black (the worst grade), but that they soon changed from

black to blue, from blue to yellow, and from yellow to white.

It was so unusual for a manufacturer to concern himself in this way with the welfare of his people that the fame of these eccentricities of Owen spread far and wide. But Owen's eccentricity went far deeper than this, and incredulous manufacturers learnt that this misguided member of their class was giving his chief attention to the education of his workers, and, more especially, of their children. There might, they thought, possibly be some addition to profits in seeing that workpeople lived decently (though it was difficult to see how), but to waste time and even money on educating one's workers' children seemed madness to most business men. Owen was planning to educate, in suitable fashion, all children in New Lanark between the ages of one and ten ; no child was to enter his mill until that age, and during youth each child was to have time to continue some education ; even adult workers were to have lectures and books provided. The stupefying effect of all this on the mind of the average employer was only increased when he reminded himself that this man, with all these bees in his bonnet, was at the same time making his business pay in a way that was the envy of many an ordinary mill-owner.

Education, in Owen's eyes, was the instrument with which the ' New Moral World ' was to be built ; no trouble, therefore, could be too great, in shaping the education in the best way for its purpose. If only the right surroundings and education could be provided for the young from their birth, he thought that the faults of society could be remedied in one generation. He wanted education provided by the government, on a national scale, for all children, and his schools at New Lanark were meant chiefly as an experiment, on the proved success of which the government would feel able to act. It is hard to appreciate the originality of Owen's educational ideas. To contemplate universal education at all marks him out as a thinker far in advance of contemporary opinion ; and when to this is added the originality of his conception of

what this education should mean, it becomes plain that Owen's work in education, apart from anything else, entitles him to a high place as a pioneer.

Owen's educational plans started from a child's earliest years, for, seeing that the ordinary working-class home lacked nearly all the things necessary for the right training of a child in good habits, Owen opened his playground and recreation rooms to all children above the age of one. Infant schools, run on lines that are just coming to be followed to-day, dealt with those young children who were old enough to learn good habits though not to be taught lessons, while the older children were given an education for life which was very different from the education normally provided at the time. At ten, Owen was obliged to admit them as factory workers, and could do no more than allow them to attend some classes out of working hours, a plan that he saw was bad, as children were too tired to gain much. The importance attached to education at New Lanark was symbolized by a large building with the imposing name ' The Institute for the Formation of Character '.

The general opinion in Owen's day was that education was perfectly unnecessary for the children of ' the labouring poor '. Most employers, and many Members of Parliament, saw in a working boy who could read only a ploughboy spoilt ; education was a preserve of the upper classes, and any suggestion of throwing it open to the artisan class was looked on with horror, as certain to cause ' red ruin and the breaking up of laws '. The few who rose to the imaginative height of conceiving such a thing as working-class education usually limited this education to equipping the young worker with the bare minimum needed to learn to calculate, to write, and to read his Bible.

Owen trod new paths. His children learnt singing, dancing, drilling, in their fine hall ; they were given pictures, models, and ' real things ' to play with ; they were taken into the country to watch the wonders of Nature. Books were to be used only when asked for.

The children were to learn by asking questions, to do what interested them, to move about freely, and to acquire all the necessary knowledge in the way that a child naturally learns its way about the world—through the promptings of its own curiosity. Surrounded by an atmosphere of loving care, the little ones of New Lanark learnt to behave well, to live in friendly fashion with each other, and so to lay the foundations of that right type of character that was to produce the ' New Moral World ' of Owen's dreams. The ordinary lessons in history, geography, natural science, followed methods suited to the child mind, and the children, being interested, worked happily and learnt much. In accordance with the theory that man merits neither praise nor blame, Owen's school knew neither rewards nor punishments.

Owen's ideas are so much like educational ideas of to-day that it requires an effort of the imagination to appreciate their originality. The nursery schools of to-day have the same aim as his infant schools, that of setting the child (and particularly the child with unfavourable home surroundings) in the best conditions for starting him on the right road to development of mind, body, and soul. But Owen was ahead of average opinion even of to-day. He thought this early skilled care was the right of every child in the country. His understanding of the child mind, his ' play ' methods, his trust in the educational value of a child's natural curiosity, likewise correspond to much that is best in schools to-day. But it was very long before these ideas crept into schools. Owen here, too, was far ahead of his contemporaries. It is curious to remember that these pioneer ideas were the ideas, not of an educationist, but of a business man, working in a career that for most men provides enough exertion to keep them busy all their life. These children of Owen's, if they had been anywhere else than at New Lanark, would have been toiling perhaps fourteen hours a day in an unhealthy mill, or acting as beasts of burden underground, knowing nothing of life but its dreariness and toil. Even if they had been among the fortunate few

who received any education at all, they would have been in one of the Lancasterian schools. These schools were in themselves a great advance, and they alone provided some education for the children of the working class at that time; but, aiming at educating the largest possible number at the lowest possible cost, the methods and scope of the teaching was very inferior to that at New Lanark. Instead of moving about, playing, exercising mind and body in the pleasantest way, the children would have been sitting still on benches, being drilled in batches in the 'Three R's' by a monitor, who had himself learnt the day's lessons earlier from the master. Set against this background Owen's school shows up in its true colours, and it is easy to understand why streams of visitors found their way to the banks of the Clyde. Many found inspiration there, and one exuberant spectator thought the sight so touching that 'the pen of a Milton and the pencil of a Rubens could not do justice to such a picture'.

For thirteen years Owen remained at New Lanark, putting his theories to the test of practice; then, convinced that they had stood the test, he stepped forth into a larger world. He had, he claimed, 'found it possible with the certainty of a law of Nature to make the human race good, wise, and happy'; it now only remained for the government to follow his example on a large scale; England was to be New Lanark writ large, with the government as managing director.

He introduced his views to the world between 1812 and 1816 in four essays on 'A New View of Society' and in a number of 'Addresses' and 'Reports'. Starting with his general principle that 'Any character from the best to the worst can be given to any community', he showed how he had practised this at New Lanark with complete success, and called on the government to play its part, by securing to all its citizens the right kind of education and environment and so ending the absurd system under which 'we continue to allow generation after generation to be taught crime from their infancy, and when so taught,

hunt them like beasts of the forest until they are entangled in the toils and nets of the Law '.

The government and the nation paid more attention to this appeal than might have been expected. Owen's work at New Lanark had prepared a public for his writings, and though the views were original, the state of the country was so disquieting that some cure of a wide-reaching kind seemed essential. It was education that Owen was mainly urging, and certainly the country had so little of that, that an increase might help affairs. For all the government knew, children might be ' passive compounds ', as Owen believed, who could be shaped into something more to a government's liking than the discontented, poor, dangerously-inflamed masses of the present. His scheme claimed to prevent idleness, poverty, crime and punishment, and all who had seen New Lanark supported Owen's assertion that a great increase in happiness and good habits had resulted from his work there. Owen, later, dwelt with complacency on the memory of these years when he was consulted by the Prime Minister, received by bishops, when he read his essays to the Archbishop of Canterbury and became the centre of a distinguished circle of uneasy politicians and earnest reformers. A kind of Pilgrims' Way was set up to New Lanark, where Owen entertained a curious gathering of English and foreign inquirers. The Essays sold well, and Owen had some ' superiorly bound ' copies sent to European rulers ; one was even sent to Napoleon, to while away the long hours at St. Helena. In short, the universal favourite of the small Welsh town now enjoyed a new popularity in a far wider sphere. ' I was the most generally popular character living,' he said.

Not even Owen's careless optimism could think that his ' New Moral World ' would be set up all in a moment, and in the meantime he was impatient for some immediate relief of the worst ills. He took up the cause of factory children, and tried first to persuade his fellow employers to copy him. Thwarted here and overwhelmed by the selfishness shown by the other

manufacturers, he turned to Parliament. The government professed to be willing to act when it had the support of the rank and file of the party, and so Owen flung himself into the task of securing this support, a task that occupied him for two years. The manufacturers had much influence in the House of Commons, and his attempt to convince members that it was the duty of the State to save helpless children from the greed and inhumanity of their employers roused the manufacturers to organize opposition to Owen's proposed measure. Was not this the man who had said : ' Perish the cotton trade—perish even the political supremacy of our country . . . rather than they shall be upheld by the sacrifice of everything valuable in life by those who are the means of supporting them ' ? By their efforts the answer to Owen's impassioned question : ' Shall we make laws to imprison those who purloin even a growing twig . . . and not restrain those who rob millions of fellow creatures in pursuit of gain ? ' was so long delayed and so ineffectual as to amount to a virtual negative. A Factory Act was passed in 1819, as a consequence of the agitation begun by Owen, but it fell so far short of what he had demanded that he had lost interest in it long before the end. His work, however, had not been wasted ; for the first time factory owners had to admit outside interference in their mills. The conditions laid down were not enforced ; the hours still possible for very young children were too long, but it was a step towards recognition of the community's responsibility for those too weak to protect themselves, and out of such small beginnings has grown to-day's elaborate and systematic regulation of factory conditions by the State. Some of Owen's speeches on this subject, as on education, are interesting, because they express ideas that are considered very advanced even to-day. Henry Ford, with his ' economy of high wages ', seems to be foreshadowed when he says : ' No evil ought to be more dreaded by manufacturers than low wages of labour or a want of the means to procure reasonable comfort among the working classes. These, because of their numbers, are the greatest

consumers of all articles, and it will always be found that when wages are high the country prospers and when they are low all classes suffer.'

To put forward a new view of society, and to force action on an unwilling Parliament, was not enough to absorb Owen's abounding energies, and the same period saw the birth of his most original idea. In 1815 England suffered a trade slump which caused unemployment; agricultural wages fell 50 per cent, and in some parts the paupers numbered half the population. At a meeting held to consider these disquieting facts, Owen was asked to suggest remedies to a Committee appointed by Parliament. The Committee wanted help in dealing with the poor; Owen, taking their invitation as an opening to tread unknown ways, submitted a scheme for 'the relief of the manufacturing and labouring poor', which staggered them by its wide reach and originality. In the present society, Owen maintained, the poor could not be properly relieved; society must therefore be altered to their needs. He proposed that communities of fifteen hundred paupers be set up by the government, financed out of the poor rate; the paupers would support themselves by their own labour and even exchange the surplus with the outside world. They would live a communal life in 'Villages of Co-operation', no one owning anything. Dormitories for all children, schools where they would be brought up free from those faults that were partly responsible for the present social evils, common dining-rooms and libraries, all were sketched in glowing terms. He even enlivened the draft of his scheme by drawings of the quadrangles round which the 'Villages' were to be built. Critics called them 'Parallelograms of Paupers'. Despite Owen's assurance that 'it is as easy as setting up a new manufactory', the Committee did not act on this unexpected scheme, so he set about making it known to the public, and it speaks well for the influence of burning enthusiasm that he succeeded in obtaining for it serious discussion by philanthropists and even by the House of Commons.

In the course of his publicity campaign, his Plan, as was common with Owen's plans, underwent a change. Intended at first only as a way of solving unemployment problems, his ' Villages of Co-operation ' soon seized his imagination as a scheme for setting all human society on a saner basis. If the ' Quadrangular Paradises ' were good for paupers they would be even better for every one else ; here was the way of setting people in the right environment for making society perfect. Owen therefore became absorbed in preaching his ' co-operative ' idea. Utopia was to be based on co-operative production, voluntary exchange, and socially controlled distribution. He waxed lyrical over the joys of life in a community where the death of dear ones would be unimportant, since each would have the rest of the community to love and be loved by. The innocent invitation of the Committee was thus responsible for the appearance of a new Owen ; out of his ' Villages ' there grew the first germ of practical Socialism and of modern Co-operation, and his old ways of life were soon left behind. The more he wrote about his ' Plan ' the wilder he became ; soon he was writing like a seer or a prophet instead of like the employer of New Lanark.

While his mind underwent this change his circumstances were equally affected by the production of the ' Plan for the Relief of the Poor '. Those who had invited his suggestion drew back in alarm ; Utopias were not in their line. The government too, as the poor grew more and more rebellious, lost interest in schemes for their good ; prison, they began to think, was a better place for them than State-supported communities. Owen was dropped by his earlier patrons, and Tory and official circles no longer found a place for him.

Owen also, with his curious inconsequence, went out of his way to alienate another large class of sympathizers—the Church. At a meeting to expound his Plan, he put the question, why, since it would so easily make mankind good and happy, had no one thought of it before. ' Why should so many countless millions of our fellow creatures,

through each generation, have been the victims of ignorance, superstition, mental degradation, and wretchedness ? ' He gives the answer himself : ' It is religion,' he says, ' whose gross errors have made man the most inconsistent and miserable being in existence. By the errors of religion man has been made a weak and imbecile animal, a fanatic, or a miserable hypocrite. Should these qualities be carried . . . into Paradise itself, a Paradise would not be found.' He said later that the day of this speech was ' the day on which bigotry and superstition and all false religions received their death-blow ', but the only death-blow that can be perceived is one to his hopes of getting his Plan put into practice. The extravagance, together with the unorthodoxy, of these views disgusted many of his supporters ; opponents of his schemes had only to start the hare of ' atheist ' and hot on the scent went many who might have approved his ideas on their merits.

The publishing of his Plan thus brought to an end this first phase of Owen's career ; the second phase was to present a remarkable contrast. There are two peaks in his life, of not unequal height, but between them yawns a gulf ; they are part of two distinct mountain systems. Owen had no politics, but he had appealed to the government for support and in those days governments were Tory. The Prime Minister who consulted him was the leader in the repression of the working class, and Owen was a ' captain of industry ' ; his philanthropy was of the ' benevolent despot ' type ; his position seemed to guarantee that he would always hold ideas congenial to the ruling classes. It was therefore among those ruling classes that he first gained ascendency. After 1817 they grew chilly about his ideas, and Owen at last sank below their horizon. When next he rose to fame it was in a new sphere ; it was as a leader of working-class movements, the inspirer of a very aggressive phase in Trade Unionism, the founder of the Co-operative Movement, the father of British Socialism, that Owen once more came to the front.

The gap between his two peaks of influence was covered by the years 1818–1830. This gap existed in the minds of other people, but not in that of Owen himself ; he went straight on, full of his community idea, and all he did had that behind it. While his life seems to the observer to show clear breaks, to him there was only a change from one instrument to another. When one tool failed to set up the New Moral World he tried another ; government had failed him, so he turned to fresh methods of carrying out his views. He travelled through Europe first, bringing his Plan to the notice of the assembled great monarchs at Aix, and visiting pioneer schools to compare them with New Lanark. Later he went to America to set up in real life one of his ' Quadrangular Paradises ' in an atmosphere freer than that of the tradition-ridden Old World.

For four years there was a Parallelogram in existence. His method of starting the great experiment was characteristically casual ; a lecturing tour to preach his ideas, the purchase of land and buildings, and then, with no more preparation, an invitation was issued to ' the industrious and well disposed of all nations ' to join the new society. Nine hundred offered themselves as both industrious and well disposed, and, with only their own word for their qualifications, Owen set up his first co-operative commonwealth, named with undue optimism ' New Harmony '. Life was to be lived on the principles set forth in his Plan ; the sort of life it resulted in can be read in N. Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*, though the community there pictured was not one of Owen's. Far from producing more than they needed the co-operators never found they had enough for their own needs, and they grumbled in consequence ; all shunned the hardest work, they quarrelled, and finally split into several small communities. This failure left Owen cheerful as ever ; it was not his principles that were at fault, but ' families trained in the individual system, founded upon superstition, have not acquired those qualitites of forbearance and charity which are necessary '. Unfortunately this drawback was unavoidable, and the

other colonies set up all failed in the same way. They were based on unsound economics and left out of account the weakness of human nature.

In 1829 Owen left America for England, where his position had been for a time one of isolation. He had lost his hold on the upper classes, but was hateful to the foes of the government as the friend of Sidmouth and the Church, a manufacturer, a capitalist ; a man is known by the friends he makes, and, though he had now lost those friends, the working class took its tone from Cobbett, who wrote from America about ' a Mr. Owen who has a scheme which at least has the merit of perfect novelty, for of such a thing as a community of paupers I believe no human being ever before heard '. With other reformers, too, he had few points of contact ; middle-class Radicals, though sharing his educational interests, loathed the idea of communities ; his desire for universal interference with the liberty of the individual also ran counter to their passion for *laissez-faire.*

So Owen stood alone, but that was of little importance since he was constitutionally incapable of acting in concert for any length of time. He was not quarrelsome like Cobbett, but he could not co-operate, however much he might preach the idea of co-operation. There was only one opinion—his own ; compromise meant giving in to what he knew was wrong ; opposition hardly ruffled him, since it was always ' ill-informed ' or ' unwanted '. He said critics of the Plan ' reminded him of the individuals in an ill-managed lunatic asylum ', and when resentment was shown at such an attitude, he remarked carelessly, ' There is no stability in distinguished patrons.'

His isolation came to an end with the discovery that while his gospel of co-operation had fallen on stony ground among the governing class, some of his seed had fallen on more fruitful ground elsewhere. The magic word, ' co-operation ', which to the government sounded like revolution and to the Benthamite reformers seemed the negation of liberty, came to the working class as a message of hope. The stone that the government had rejected

became the corner-stone of Socialism. In ' co-operation ' the workers saw salvation from exploitation. If they could establish self-supporting villages, where all worked and none laboured for the profit of employers, where they would be their own masters, exchanging their own products, then the machines that they hated might be put to their own advantage. Fired by this idea small bodies of thoughtful working people joined together to form ' Co-operative Trading Societies ', which were to save the profits that normally went to the ' middleman ', with a view to founding an Owenite community when the savings were large enough. Workmen too began to make articles on their own, exchanging with each other articles of different sorts and trying to eliminate the employer. By 1830 there were three hundred of these petty co-operative enterprises in England, owing their idea to Owen, but independent of him in origin and knowing nothing of him personally. Owenism, in fact, grew most while Owen was out of the country, and Owenism was not identical with the theories of Owen.

Owen's unsought disciples gave to their schemes the name of ' Owenism ', sometimes ' Communism ', and later ' Socialism ' which finally superseded the other two ; it was from Owen that they took their basic idea of labour's ' right to the whole produce ' of its labour, of co-operation in place of competition, of union of the many weak into something strong. But Owen accepted their discipleship with reluctance. The petty retail shops adopting his grand idea of co-operation seemed to him to lessen its grandeur ; he liked things on the grand scale, and small beginnings interested him little ; he had not conceived it as a plan that could be put into practice *by* the workers though it was for their benefit ; Owen wanted, not fellow workers, but pupils. The position was a curious one ; but if men persist in following, the man they follow is bound to act as leader, and, once persuaded that here was a new instrument to his hand for setting up the New Moral World, Owen flung himself into the new activities with a zeal which soon transformed the workers' organizations

out of recognition, raised them to a high pitch for a time, then left them in ruins.

Under the true Owen touch small beginnings blossomed at once into wide-spreading schemes. Small stores were lost in ' The National Equitable Labour Exchange ', which was to replace shops, supersede money by ' Labour Notes ', and solve all commercial problems. Trade Unions consisting merely of the men in one trade in one place grew into the ' Grand National Consolidated Trades Union ' with half a million members, which was to oust the whole system of private employers and private profit. A ' National Regeneration Society ' was to secure a universal ' Eight Hours Day ' by a general strike. In the two years following the disappointing Reform Bill, Owen with his fiery cross inspired the working class to an extraordinary outburst of activity ; from the seeds sowed at this time sprang much later working-class development.

The exuberant growth of these two years ended in an equally sudden decay. For two years Owen dominated working-class activity, then he dropped out of it as suddenly as he had entered it. The ' Grand National Consolidated Trades Union ' fell to pieces, ruined by the strain of strike pay and Owen's domineering ways ; the ' National Equitable Labour Exchange ' was a financial failure ; the ' Labour Notes ' failed to win their way into general use. All the fine organizations faded away ; they had flowered prematurely and were without roots. Owen had not achieved the objects of the workers nor had he found in Trade Unions the right tool for his ends ; their direct connexion was at an end. ' Owen,' said Bentham, ' began in vapour and ended in smoke.' He now adapted his organizations to new methods with no hesitation ; the last experiments had failed, so he must try new ones ; the workers had proved no more useful than his earlier associates, so he took no particular further interest in them. Politics having disappointed him, he devoted the rest of his life to the moral side of the ' New World ' ; he rechristened his societies accordingly. The ' Grand

National' reappeared as the 'British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry and Knowledge', to suffer a further change into the slightly handier though even more comprehensive 'Association of All Classes of All Nations'. The old Owen of New Lanark finally disappeared after 1835. Owen lived another quarter of a century and was busy till death, but his work was only of interest to those who followed him in what was almost a religion that he preached. 'Halls of Science' were built for the practice of this 'secularist religion'. He continued to write, but in the vague way that had shown itself in the later developments of his 'Plan'. At the age of eighty-two he became a Spiritualist, holding communication with Shelley and Napoleon; when he was eighty-seven he wrote an *Autobiography*, and just before he died he had set out to organize the education of Liverpool.

Bentham's verdict on Owen may be justified if tangible results alone are looked for. Owen put out immense efforts in several directions, with results far from proportionate to his expenditure of energy. This was seen both in his work for factory regulation in 1816–1819 and in his union with the workers later. It was at New Lanark only that practical success crowned his efforts, and there his achievements were both original and great. He gave one of the first object-lessons in 'welfare work'; he proved that it was possible to do what the economists said was impossible. In education, in care for employees, in views on high wages and shorter hours as means of increasing profits he stimulated thought and provided useful experiments for future benefit.

So far as practical achievement goes, the later years were barren compared to those spent at New Lanark. Owen was stronger in personality and business ability than in carrying through great schemes of social reconstruction, based too trustfully on wrong ideas. His claim to fame rests on the ideas which he evolved but failed to put into practice. His idea of co-operation seemed impracticable when expressed in communities that ran

counter to the instincts of mankind, but the idea that he could not clothe himself, others clothed, and the great Co-operative Movement of to-day looks to him as its inspirer. His fine Trade Union structures of 1834 came tumbling about his ears, but later generations of builders salvaged material from the wreck and Trade Unions also own his influence at a later date. Socialism is another modern movement which was inspired by the seemingly unpractical ideas of Owen ; he saw that ' social control ' of machinery and capital was essential if the new age of machinery was to benefit mankind at large, and not only one class. His Socialism was not democratic ; he wanted only reform of society, and thought political reform not worth bothering about, and he would perhaps fail to recognize modern Socialism as his own offspring. But the men who later formulated Socialist theories in England took some of their inspiration from him, since his and their basic idea is that the distribution of wealth shall not be left to the free play of ' supply and demand ' and man's natural greediness. Other movements of the nineteenth century also derived from Owen in lesser degrees. The Chartist leaders were nearly all believers in Owenism ; the Christian Socialists owed some of their ideas to him ; followers of Owen are to be found among all organizations of workers in later years of the nineteenth century.

It is thus as a provider of ideas that Owen was great. As a practical leader he was apt to vitiate the working of his own ideas, partly by overestimating the ease with which they would transform society. ' The rapture of the forward view ' was his to such an extent that he was blind to obstacles in the way. He was in too much of a hurry ; the Golden Age was always at hand, and its introduction was always ' so easy '. The ideas themselves proved fruitful as well as original, and Owen could inspire though he could not lead to success or execute them himself ; he flung ideas broadcast and left to others the task of translating them into action and organization.

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CHAPTER IV

FRANCIS PLACE

1771–1854

COBBETT and Owen both had the warm sympathies and ardent temper that seem proper to the agitator, but that a warm heart is no essential part of the reformer's equipment is shown by the career of Francis Place. Place did as much for the working classes as the other two, but he worked from conviction rather than sympathy, from the head rather than from the heart. Partly because of his ' superior ' and unattractive attitude, his name is much less known to-day than the others' and his work at the time was less conspicuous though not less influential. There is in his character a singular lack of points of human contact, so that his life of devotion to a public cause has an aridity which easily makes it appear dull. The interest that shines out through the surface dullness comes from the oddity of his career ; in all the varied ranks of English political characters there is no one like Place. Intent on raising the working classes to a position of independence, he cared nothing for his reputation, nothing for the appearance of power, which to most men matters so much, but was content to remain in the background so long as the work went forward. At certain moments his influence far exceeded that of the men who attracted the public gaze, but it was always exerted from behind the scenes ; he never entered the House of Commons, yet his influence there was much greater than that of many members. He is further distinguished from most agitators by the motive which inspired his unselfish labours ; he slaved early and late to put into practice certain abstract theories about politics and society ; he had not that love of his fellow

creatures which sustained reformers of the type of Cobbett and Owen, but found all those with whom he came in contact either fools or knaves or both, and he carried on his work in constant irritation with not only foes but friends.

His parentage and early surroundings were, like those of the other two, humble, but they were far less respectable; his father kept, first, a private debtor's prison; later, a tavern; and at times failed even to provide his family with a home of any sort. Home discipline consisted entirely of blows, while he learnt the ways of the world in the streets of a poor quarter of London; he had some slight schooling and was then apprenticed to a tailor. At the age of eighteen he married a girl of seventeen, and she and their first child were involved with him two years later in a grim experience of grinding poverty, which befell him through a strike followed by unemployment.

Nothing in this heredity or environment would suggest that this 'offspring of a sponging-house' would develop into a political reformer, devoting his whole energies to a public cause; but, after sowing a few wild oats, Place rapidly showed himself to be made of uncommon stuff and very early entered into the special sort of activity which was in later years to be his life's work.

He made his first entry into public affairs through the very humble doorway of his own trade. A strike occurred and he at once busied himself in organizing strike pay so as to make it do its utmost. Because of this activity he was refused work by all employers when the strike ended in failure, and he came near to starvation in consequence. This experience of the helpless dependence of the workman on an employer sowed in his mind the seeds of ideas that were to develop later. The enforced idleness had other important effects; to earn a little money in the lean months he entered further into the trade club world by organizing clubs in other small trades, and, characteristically, he turned the dreary time of unemployment to good account by using his leisure to embark on a stiff course of education. The apparatus of this education he

owed to a friendly charwoman who cleaned the rooms of a barrister, from whose shelves she surreptitiously borrowed the books needed. Through this chance the half-starved tailor, worn with anxiety, amid all the discomfort implied in family life in two rooms, was able to strengthen his natural intellectual powers by an exacting study of mathematics, economics, and philosophy.

The other formative influences of these years came from the French Revolution and his membership of the London Corresponding Society, one of the democratic societies which sprang up in England under the stimulus of revolutionary ideas. In this society Place, like many other working men of his day, gained not only ideas but practical experience in organizing and in working with other men. Universal suffrage was the object of the London Corresponding Society, but because it believed in the theories of Thomas Paine, who was a Republican, its founder, the shoemaker Hardy, was tried for his life on a charge of treason. ' Citizen Place ' took some part in organizing the defence, and notes, in a spirit of complacency characteristic of him in later days, ' I was very active and useful in directing others, and was well pleased to see the esteem in which I was held.' The government prosecution was unsuccessful, the exploiting of the Jacobin danger by Pitt received a check, but Place grew dissatisfied with the workings of the society and resigned shortly before it was suppressed in 1799.

Place had drawn several lessons from his experiences, but the one on which he acted first was the necessity of freeing himself from dependence on an employer. This early sally into public affairs was therefore followed by ten years of purely private life, and it was nearly twenty years before he felt secure enough to devote to politics the powers of organizing and the industry which in the interval built up a successful tailoring business. The shop which began in Charing Cross Road optimistically with one shilling and tenpence in cash assets boasted, by 1816, thirty employees, a plate-glass window, and a profit for that year of three thousand pounds. Place felt for his

unsuspecting customers a contempt beyond words; he would have shared heartily the views of Meredith's Countess, sister of Evan Harrington, on the vileness of a trade which involved so much 'dancing attendance on coxcombs'. When the pain of suppressing his feelings became unbearable he soothed himself by thoughts of the library of political books and pamphlets that he was collecting over the shop, and reflected on the verdict that would be passed by his haughty patrons if they knew that their tailor had claims to education; 'an abominable offence in a tailor'. Presumably he succeeded in keeping both feelings and books secret, since the business was a great success, so that in 1817 he was able to turn it over to a son and to enter once more the congenial world of politics. He kept the library over the shop as a sort of committee-room and centre for all engaged with him in the forwarding of the Radical cause in the following twenty years.

As his private life was sunk so completely in his public career, it is convenient to dismiss it here, shortly and in advance. The wife of his youth brought him fifteen children, a number that must surely have been embarrassing when his later views came to include the need for the deliberate restriction of population. Her death called forth an expression of emotion otherwise singularly lacking in his life; but a second marriage soon followed, bringing disapproval from friends and no happiness to himself; three years before his death he left his wife and lived with a daughter. During the last twenty years he was less fortunate in his financial affairs; he had to leave Charing Cross Road and his library, thereby reducing his activities, and death was preceded by a very long slow decay of his powers. When active participation in affairs became impossible he turned, first to writing accounts of public events in which he had been concerned between 1806–1838, and later to collecting Press accounts; these records now form the happy hunting-grounds of historians concerned with the years on either side the Reform Movement.

Place's public work was directed towards putting into the hands of the working man all the weapons that he needed in his struggle to reach an equal footing with his employer. Of the striking improvement which took place in the material condition of the workers in the first half of the nineteenth century much was due to the efforts of philanthropists and outsiders. The raising of their status and growth of their independence had, however, to be won by their own struggles, and Place was one of those who taught them how to help themselves. For this struggle various weapons were needed, so Place's work took various forms. The way of escape from industrial exploitation, he saw, lay through political methods; working men must have votes, so that they could end the class-legislation of a class-legislature; they must be freed from laws forbidding them to overcome individual weakness by combining together to bargain with their employers; they must have cheap newspapers within their means and education within their reach. Here was a programme; item by item Place set to work to carry it out. Once it was secured he thought the workers could be left alone to work out their own salvation, independent of social legislation and philanthropy; and to its accomplishment he gave his time and capacities, passing his days in committees, in inquiries, in organizing elections and petitions, in all the dullest side of political activity. Obscure but powerful he sat in the Charing Cross Library, a political spider spinning a political web.

The need for introducing into the House of Commons some members who would voice the interests of the working class led him to leave his private business to look after itself for a short time in 1807. The 'bread, beef, and beer' methods by which the ducal house of Northumberland sought to win the votes of the ten thousand 'free, honourable, and independent voters' who formed the electorate of Westminster (one of the few democratic constituencies of the day) roused his indignation. He galvanized others into activity, there was an active election campaign, as the result of which Burdett, a

Radical, was returned to represent Westminster. It was no small achievement to return a Radical at a moment when the war against France was still giving the foes of Radicalism the opportunity of branding it with the taint of revolutionary sympathies. It was, however, a fortunate chance which put Place's shop in Westminster, where the wide franchise and the old connexion with Charles James Fox, who represented the constituency until his death in 1806, suggested it as a likely scene for the revival of Radicalism not only to Place but to Cobbett.

It was another ten years before Place felt able to give himself wholly to this sort of work, but he never dropped entirely out of the electoral world of Westminster, and he found time for educational efforts. A ridiculous quarrel arose with Burdett which caused Place to sulk under Burdett's accusation of treachery; Place was further inclined to keep out of affairs by the influence which Cobbett and Hunt gained among Radicals, an influence despised by him as 'noisy agitating'.

His aloofness came to an end in 1818, when the need for saving the Radical seat won in 1807 and for gaining the second Westminster seat for the Radical cause brought him out into full activity once more. He became, as he says, 'at once King, Lords and Commons, Judge, Jury, and Jack Ketch', and both seats were won for Radicalism after the two elections of 1818 and 1819, so that Place now had inside the House of Commons two Radical mouthpieces, through whom he proposed to make known the needs of the large unrepresented masses of the working class. The next step was to teach these mouthpieces the message that they were to deliver, and Burdett and Hobhouse underwent a stern training at the hands of a teacher who was by no means patient; Burdett he found 'too rich, too high, and too lazy', while Hobhouse soon 'tired in the narrow path'. Such as they were, however, he had to make the best of them, since through them alone could he secure a hearing for the Radical gospel among those 'stultified Tories' and 'gabbling

Whigs' who made up 'that motley assembly', 'the rascally House of Commons'.

The message that was to be delivered to the House of Commons, Place had himself learnt from Bentham. In a world full mainly of worthless men, Place had found, about 1810, a group of shining exceptions clustered round the recluse Bentham. His rather odd ambition 'to be confided in by the wise and the good' was here fulfilled. He became a friend of James Mill, then of Bentham; he stayed with Bentham, learning Latin from Mill in the remarkable educational forcing-house set up to foster the intellect of the young John Stuart Mill. He put his business capacity at the disposal of both his friends, and wrestled with the task of reducing to order the chaotic writings of the Utilitarian philosopher, who wrote his books on unnumbered sheets of paper, and commonly rewrote every part several times, on different schemes, with no indication that the scheme had been changed and no clue to the final arrangement.

Bentham's Utilitarian philosophy fitted in with the way in which experience and temperament had already shaped Place's ideas, and it also fostered their further development on the same lines. The test of 'utility' exactly suited his practical mind; he knew from experience the inefficiency, corruption, and unfairness of much of the governmental machinery, and here was a rational test by which it was clearly condemned and according to which its reform might be advocated on grounds of theory as well as of experience. His own view that universal votes alone would secure the interests of the working class was confirmed by the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' principle, since, in the medieval phrase, 'what touches all should be dealt with by all'. He embraced with fervour the individualist Benthamite doctrine that 'enlightened self-interest' secures not only the good of the individual, but, incidentally, that of the community; this gave sanction to his mistrust of government interference, and it also fitted in with his early conviction of the value of education. Each of these

dogmatic views took shape in the practical mind of Place as an item in his programme of practical reform; he might have adopted Mill's words: 'When I first read Bentham . . . I had what might be truly called an object in life, to be a reformer of the world', only he was a reformer in grain before he met Bentham; his original inspiration came from within and was only strengthened and shaped by Utilitarianism.

Place was a Radical, and so was Cobbett, but there was little in common between Place's intellectual, abstract Radicalism and that of Cobbett, which was more emotional, more human, less definitely directed towards a clearly visualized end. It is almost surprising to find in how many causes they naturally worked in common, since their common Radicalism so often sinks out of sight behind the differences of outlook and method. Because Place calls Cobbett 'a vile rascal' and says he 'is too ignorant to see that the common people must ever be imbecile when not encouraged and supported by those who have money and influence', it is easy to forget that both men worked for reform of Parliament, for abolition of sinecures and corruption, for a free Press, for freedom of combination among workmen.

Education was the part of Place's programme which first received attention. In 1820 Brougham made his famous remark, 'The schoolmaster is abroad', and Place, in this as in so many ways, typified his day; he wanted the schoolmaster 'to prevail in the land'. He worked with the Lancasterian Society in its attempt to provide some education for the children of the working class; he threw himself into Bentham's remarkable project of a school to be built in his own grounds and to be so constructed that a thousand children might be taught under the supervision of one master, who, seated on a revolving chair at the centre of a circular room, could control the children arranged in nine concentric rows of tiered benches. Even Place's organizing capability failed to bring this scheme to maturity, and it is difficult to imagine how any education administered in these conditions and

according to the Lancasterian ' mass ' method could have produced that rational ' enlightenment ' which the Benthamites sought from education. Place, in expecting the spread of education to bring about a regeneration of society, was at one with the Utilitarians : ' We do not expect the regeneration of mankind from unselfish benevolence and love of justice, but from the effect of education enlightening the intellect.' Education, he believed, would lessen unemployment by teaching people the need for restricting population ; it would enable the workers to perceive where their best interests lay and to regulate their lives rationally. Yet the education that was thus to change society would, if carried out on Lancasterian lines, train little but the memory ; mechanical learning and automatic discipline, which alone were possible, could hardly have produced the enlightenment required. It is singular how many other self-educated men, like Place, have exaggerated the value of education ; the strengthening of intellect and character which they have derived from their unaided wrestlings with mathematics or philosophy blind them to the slight influence that the mere acquisition of knowledge can have. Like Owen, Place found that educational zeal was not enough for the educational reformer ; he lacked the necessary religious orthodoxy and was driven to give up his work with the Lancasterians.

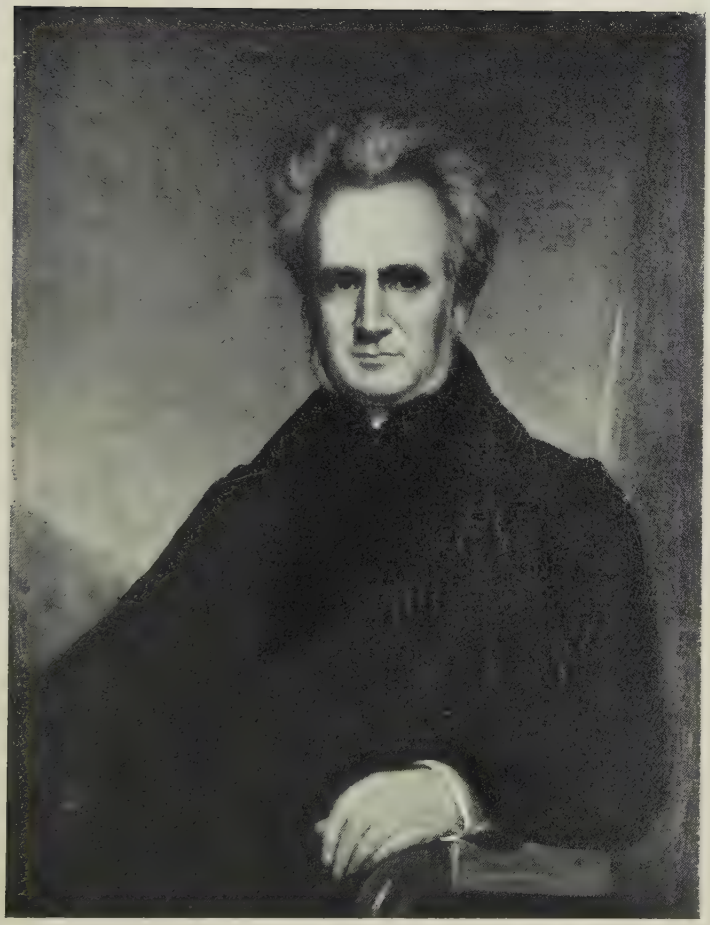
He found fresh scope for his enthusiasm in helping the adult working man to acquire some measure of the education that had been denied him in youth, and the cause now known as ' Adult Education ' counts him among its pioneers. He roused interest, organized, and (his inevitable part) raised money for the London Mechanics' Institute, an educational venture which was a permanent success. Place was not only interested in the provision of education ; he took a keen interest in its form and content ; as a parent he sought for schools where the education should be ' modern ', where modern languages were taught, where the children would learn economics and ' whatever subjects would put the young

into touch with the world in which they were destined to live and act '.

His most original and effective achievement was the repeal of the Combination Act by Parliament in 1824–25. This Act had been passed by Pitt at the time when the government was, or pretended to be, fearful lest the working class, bowed under a heavy weight of poverty and discontent, should band together in revolutionary activities. This Act served a double purpose : it merged, say Mr. and Mrs. Webb, in their *History of Trade Unionism*, ' the capitalists' objection to high wages and the politicians' dislike of democratic institutions '. All combination for purposes of bargaining about wages was forbidden, and this restriction on the workmen was balanced by a clause forbidding masters to combine. For obvious reasons, the clause against the masters was never put into force, while prosecutions took place against combinations of workmen.

The threat of this law, even more than the prosecutions under it, acted as a severe check on attempts by the workers to obtain higher wages. And the Combination Act was not the only restriction on the workers' freedom to act upon the principle of ' United we stand, divided we fall ', for the Common Law looked on any ' combination ' as a criminal conspiracy, punishable with imprisonment or transportation. This view had been justified in an earlier national economy in which Parliament or magistrates undertook to regulate both wages and prices, and interference by others was regarded as meddling with the business of authority. Parliament in 1800, however, had ceased to regulate wages itself, yet it now forbade the workers to combine.

Pitt's Combination Act passed without protest and continued to work without agitation from those whom it affected, but Place early decided that an attack must be made on it as soon as circumstances were favourable. While awaiting the propitious hour, he set to work to collect facts and to acquire a complete understanding of the exact effects of the Act on industry. He had already some first-hand acquaintance with the needs and position



FRANCIS PLACE

From the painting by S. Drummond in the National Portrait Gallery

of the workers, and between 1810 and 1823 he patiently extended his observations over all trades where strikes took place, getting into touch with working-class leaders in every part of the country.

These observations strengthened his original opinion, that the Combination Act served no useful purpose and was indirectly harmful. It was offensive to him as an infringement of the liberty of the individual, but he also concluded that it had not been effective in crushing the Trade Unions, merely casting over them the stain of illegality, which rendered them violent and futile. The law worked unfairly in favour of the masters, and its existence, Place thought, embittered relations in industry and so was harmful. Place did not believe in Trade Unions and he expected their disappearance to follow on their legalization; yet he was so eager to secure their legal existence that he worked to this end for thirteen years. Once workers were free to combine he was convinced that they would find out that combination was of no value to them; but his individualism prompted him to gain them that freedom even at such laborious cost to himself.

In 1823 the right hour appeared to have arrived and the years of careful preparation culminated in a most successful offensive movement. Place worked, as always, from outside Parliament, with Hume as his tool inside, working to instructions. Hume succeeded in persuading the House of Commons to appoint a Committee to inquire into three matters, one of which was the effects of the Combination Act. The inclusion of two other points prevented suspicion from being roused, and so little interest was taken in the Committee that Hume was able both to secure his own appointment as chairman and to influence the composition of the Committee.

The next move belonged to Place, and he, strong in his knowledge of all sections of the working class, collected suitable witnesses who could be trusted to give the right sort of evidence when called before the Committee. Place saw them beforehand, and, though he laughed at

the Committee for protesting against 'interference', it seems likely that its suspicions were by no means groundless, since he acknowledged that, with some witnesses, 'it required great care not to shock their prejudices so as to prevent them doing their duty before the Committee'. Place and Hume played their respective parts so skilfully that the Bill drafted according to the Committee's recommendations not only satisfied Place's desires, but also passed the House of Commons without opposition. Place had, that is to say, succeeded in getting repealed an Act which was in the interests of the people who themselves repealed it; and he had achieved this without help from those who were to benefit by its repeal. The Act secured in 1824 gave unfettered right to workers to combine; not only was the Act of 1800 repealed, but Trade Unions were no longer to fall under the heading of conspiracies. In this achievement Place saw the end both of restraints on Trade Unions and of Trade Unions themselves: 'All will be as orderly as even a Quaker could desire,' he prophesied.

His prophecy was falsified at once; an outburst of Trade Unions and strikes speedily aroused Parliament to the real meaning of what they had so negligently allowed themselves to be lulled into doing. Huskisson was called on to undo the folly of the previous year, and a new Committee was set up, nominated this time by the President of the Board of Trade himself. Place and Hume had now to fight to retain the ground won, but their ingenuity was equal to the new emergency. Hume could not be kept off the Committee, so they had one initial advantage; they foiled the Committee's plan of calling as witnesses only employers, by summoning workers who thronged the building, clamouring to be allowed to give their evidence; they made the most of an advantage given them by an unintentional phrase in the wording of the terms of the Inquiry. Finally, a new Act restricted the complete liberty given in the first Act, but did not interfere with the right of Trade Unions to legal existence; it made it more difficult for them to carry out strikes without coming

into conflict with the law ; intimidation, molestation, and all the incidental results likely to arise in a strike were severely provided against, but the right of workers to combine for the purpose of collective bargaining was secured. Place was thus responsible for the first step in the progress of the workers from dependence to independence ; the repeal of the Combination Law first made possible all the later development of Trade Unions and enabled the workers to gain a firm footing in their struggle for a share of the wealth brought by the Industrial Revolution. The workers were duly grateful ; the gratitude of the Sheffield workmen reached Place in the shape of ' an incomparable set of knives and forks ', and the seamen presented him with ' a handsome silver vase '. Place doubtless found his greatest pleasure in the thought that the House of Commons, which he so thoroughly despised, had been made his tool in carrying through a measure which gave none of its members any pleasure but was entirely in accordance with the desires of an outsider.

Place never touched such heights of success again, but variations of the same methods were applied to the removal of other abuses. His vigilant watch for oppression of the working class was never relaxed, and the machinery of petitions, collection of information, publication of facts, raising of funds and instruction of Members of Parliament and newspaper editors, was constantly set in motion against exploitation of the weak. He worked for reform of Parliament, for abolition of sinecures and placemen, for financial reform ; he fought against restrictions on emigration, against the repression that followed Peterloo in 1819, against the measures that prevented freedom of public meetings and of speech and writing. And when he took up a question he did it with a furious industry which filled his days and nights with unceasing labour ; he once said, ' A man must have a good many projects on hand to accomplish any ', and the remark summed up his own practice. His unostentatious but influential work became known to the outside world in time, and an article quoted by the *Dictionary of National*

Biography from a contemporary magazine shows that he was recognized as the master-Radical, pulling the strings on which danced the Radicals inside Parliament : ' Look over the notices of motions, and see when Joseph (Hume) is to storm sixpence laid out in the decoration of a public work, or sack the salary of a clerk in a public office, and when you find that in a day or two it is to astonish St. Stephen's and delight the land, then go . . . to the library of this indefatigable statesman, and you will discover him schooling the Nabob like a baby.'

Amid this mass of ' causes ' in which Place spent strenuous days, the Reform agitation of 1830–1832 stands out as next in importance to the repeal of the Combination Law. The circumstances were very different ; Place had no share in initiating the movement for Reform of Parliament, since, unlike many Radicals, he would have preferred it to come after, not before, lesser reforms ; nor was he in control of the new movement when he did join in it. But the part he played was important and was characteristic. When the movement for Reform began to take shape, he at once turned his energies to directing it along channels which his close acquaintance with the working classes and his knowledge of Parliamentary opinion taught him were most likely to lead to success. From Cobbett and other Radicals had come the exciting impulse ; Place's part was to control that impulse so that it might produce its greatest effect and might not overshoot the mark. This was the sort of task at which he excelled. His library had long been the meeting-place of those interested in the Radical cause ; he had learnt how to handle men in his Westminster elections, and he was known to and respected by working men all over the country. Finally, the course of developments inside the House of Commons was always known to him through his Radical ' pupils ', so that he had every qualification for his part of liaison officer between opinion inside and outside Parliament.

The Reform campaign illustrates once more the practical capacity of Place, but it is also interesting for

the light it throws on another, less commonly seen, aspect of his character. The death of the king launched the country on a general election just when foreign revolutions gave a new impetus to English desire for Reform of Parliament. Place at once busied himself in organizing Radical opinion in Political Unions, and as soon as the new Whig Government made itself responsible for a Reform measure he devoted himself to persuading the working class that Russell's Bill offered the greatest amount of Reform that would have any chance of success at the moment. Russell's Bill was defeated in the House of Commons; there was another general election, in which the country declared itself clearly for 'the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill'; Lord Grey came back strengthened, and Russell introduced a second Reform Bill, which went through the Lower House but was rejected by the House of Lords. The country now expressed its feelings by riots, by petitions, by burning down Nottingham Castle (the property of the Duke of Newcastle, one of the leading anti-Reform peers) and parts of Bristol, and by organizing more Political Unions. Russell framed a slightly modified third Reform Bill, and the House of Lords again rejected it. Lord Grey resigned.

Up to this point in the prolonged crisis Place played his usual part, skilfully wresting the lead among the London workers from the extremists, who were likely to rally the indifferent and the opponents into one solid block against all reform; directing Reform enthusiasm into Political Unions, which not only canalized the opinion which might have been dangerous, but also gave a solid appearance to the ranks of reformers calculated to impress politicians. He also tried to prevent large meetings which might inflame opinion and so alienate moderates.

But, when Lord Grey resigned, the crisis became acute and Place adapted fresh methods. The Duke of Wellington was invited to form a Tory Ministry, and as he had, in his last ministry, asserted that the British Constitution already approached perfection, his accession to office would mean the end of government Reform Bills.

Moderation was no longer the appropriate weapon since if the Duke formed his ministry the country would be brought at least to the verge of revolution. Place now got into touch with the ' Physical Force Party ' and discussed with them the steps to be taken supposing an Anti-Reform government took office. It was decided that ' in the event of the Duke of Wellington forming an Administration . . . open resistance should at once be made ' : Birmingham was to take the lead. Place had no hesitation in planning to use force if it offered the only hope, but his habitual moderation made him prefer something more prosaic, and he hit on a most matter-of-fact but effective device which helped to render the need for violence unnecessary. Reflecting on the chaos that would be produced in the delicate mechanism of the national finances by the outbreak of violence, it occurred to him that if only the financial stoppage could be artificially produced before the Duke formed his administration instead of after, it might prevent that administration from ever being formed. ' TO STOP THE DUKE GO FOR GOLD ' was the formula by which this happy result was to be achieved ; posters bearing the device were distributed all over the country, to be acted upon the moment it was known that a Tory government had been formed. This short and ready way of asserting the will of the people was not needed, as the Duke could not persuade the Tories to join him, and the Whigs returned to power, with a promise of more Whig peers to turn the vote in the Upper House if necessary. Dicey, however, in his *Law and Public Opinion* allots to Place an honourable position among those who, like Lord Grey, saved England from a revolution at this crisis of her political development. By organizing and controlling working-class opinion he at once helped to make it effective ; his influence was quietly exerted, but that it was real was shown by several appeals made to him. Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary, asked him, in 1831, to use his influence to quieten inflamed opinion in the rural districts ; Hobhouse suggested that he should write a report on the state of

opinion in the country for the Cabinet to read and, when the passing of the Bill was to be celebrated by illuminating London, Place was asked to see that no attack was made on houses left unilluminated.

Place was generally well content to exert influence over politics from outside Parliament, but the results of the Bill of 1832 proved so disappointing to his hopes that he actually expressed regret that he had no seat in the House. To him, Reform had appeared only as a means to an end, and the Bill of 1832 only an instalment of Reform, with more to follow. There was now a group of Radicals in Parliament, and Place expected that they would at once use their position to press the government for further Radical measures : ' There must be petitions in thousands, Ballot Bills, Triennial Bills ' : the Reform Bill itself must be reformed ; ' the Reform Bills are in themselves of little value, but as a commencement of the breaking up of the old rotten system they are invaluable.' To his admonitions the Radical members returned the amazing reply that they did not wish ' to embarrass the government '. Place hurled himself in vain against this general placidity ; like Russell, the Radicals appeared ready to ' rest and be thankful ' and remained unmoved when told that they were ' inert ', ' selfish ', ' lazy ', ' indistinguishable from the drawling Whigs '.

This divergence from the Parliamentary Radicals, combined with changes which took place in his private circumstances and the altered character of the Westminster constituency, led to a change in Place's work after 1832. There was no lessening in his zeal for working-class independence. He organized the campaign which resulted in the lowering though not in the abolition of the stamp duties on newspapers. He concerned himself with the protests made on behalf of the Dorchester labourers, who received savage transportation sentences for the crime of administering illegal oaths when they started their branch of Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in their village of Tolpuddle. But his main efforts were made in two spheres of activity which were

in one way contradictory to each other. On the one hand, he gave help to two measures passed by the Reformed Parliament, the New Poor Law and the Municipal Corporations Act, both based on Benthamite principles and of deep interest to him. But at the same time he was forming links with the working-class movements which, by way of agitation against the New Poor Law, against Stamp Acts and for factory legislation, grew into the Chartist Movement. He helped Lovett to frame the People's Charter and yet he strongly upheld the New Poor Law, which the working classes looked on as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the governing class, because it took away the giving of ' outdoor relief ' and allowed relief only to the destitute, and to them only in a work-house where conditions were to be made deliberately uninviting. A similar inconsistency might be discerned in sympathizing with the Dorchester labourers while disliking all those schemes of Owen which had led the labourers into their troubles. The explanation lay in Place's complete detachment and in his general attitude towards the working class. He critically surveyed the whole area of working-class activities and selected for support those which seemed to him to be in the right direction. He had the welfare of the workers at heart, but he, not they, must decide in what that welfare consisted. He was prepared to force on them the ' biting social cautery applied without anaesthetics ' of the New Poor Law, because he believed in the sovereign virtues of self-help. Factory laws he considered futile. Owen's socialism appeared to him ' nonsensical doctrines '. The workers must learn, however unpalatable the lesson, that from their own efforts alone could come salvation, and his support of Chartism was due, not to any belief in its chance of success, but to its being a spontaneous movement begun by the victims themselves for their own relief. ' Men ' he said, ' are like children,' and this schoolmaster point of view can be seen everywhere ; it is reasonable to suppose that though he benefited the workers greatly he must also have annoyed them greatly.

Mr. and Mrs. Webb, in their *History of Trade Unionism*, consider Place, in his sphere, 'the most remarkable politician of his day'. His importance lay in his gift for getting things done. He was arrogant—'obliged to put up with being consulted by those who have brains and pestered by those who have not'; he was offensive—'Think less of your feelings and more of your understandings'; but he got things carried out in a way often denied to the more amiable. He was the exact opposite of Dickens's Circumlocution Office, whose chief study was HOW NOT TO DO IT. To others must go the credit for inspiring new ideas, but Place was unrivalled as a doer, a translator of ideas into action.

BOOKS ON PLACE

GRAHAM WALLAS: *Life of Francis Place.*
S. AND B. WEBB: *History of Trade Unionism*, Chapters I and II.
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CHAPTER V

LORD SHAFTESBURY

1801–1885

[LORD ASHLEY, 1811–1851]

AN entirely different type of reformer and agitator is illustrated by Lord Shaftesbury, a Tory, an aristocrat, and a landowner, a man dominated by deep religious principles, of the shade of Anglicanism known as Evangelical. Yet, despite these differences he, also, passed his life in the effort to wrest reforms from a Parliament which, in his case, was made up mainly of men of his own class and antecedents.

His early career offers every contrast to that of the other reformers with whom he is here grouped. Heir to a large estate, to a peerage and a seat in the House of Lords, Harrow, Oxford, and a seat in the House of Commons fell to his lot as a matter of course, as did the minor office bestowed on him by the Tory government at the age of twenty-six. According to the conventions of the class into which he was born, he was not expected to pursue any profession, but to live on an allowance from his father until he should inherit the peerage and the estates and find his life-work in them. He was therefore free to take his own way, and Lord Ashley (he did not succeed to the better-known title until 1851) left the beaten track and, led by heart and conscience, pursued ways alien to his birth and upbringing. Starting at the opposite end from the other reformers, he made use of the political position into which he was born to redress wrongs, while the rest had to strive for the position from which they could advantageously make themselves felt.

Ashley found his life-work in relieving the sufferings of

the weak and exploited. Freed from the drudgery of earning a living, his days were filled with the drudgery of aiding over-driven women and children in mill and mine, in rescuing the insane from cruelty, little boys from the horrors of chimney-climbing, and seamstresses from the clutch of the 'sweater'. For sixty years out of his eighty-four he took all suffering humanity to be his province. He had no political cure for the ills of society, like Cobbett or Place, no 'new view of society' like Owen, but he was moved by the sight of human misery and his whole object was to lessen it; he was a humanitarian and a philanthropist.

Religion lay behind his humanitarianism; tender of conscience, he measured everything by his Christian standard and found the world falling sadly short. 'I think a man's religion should rule his conduct in every relation,' was his principle, and he acted up to it; in every crisis he sought Divine guidance, and at its bidding he devoted his life to the service of the victims of industrialism. His sympathies and sphere of work were wide, but the form of religion which inspired him was narrow. In a loveless and unhappy childhood, darkened by a bad school and unrelieved by care from his parents, a religious nurse was the one tender influence, and she taught him her strict, gloomy, Evangelical creed. The devout faith learnt from her was the moving force of his life; from it he drew inspiration for his work, but his stern belief in life as a grim struggle against evil produced in him gloom and morbid habits of examining his conscience and motives, and a distrust of pleasure that led to nervous worry and resulted in his work often being carried out in deep depression and doubt.

His long life was remarkably uniform. When he went to school, at the age of seven, the bent had already been given to his whole character by his religious reaching; before he left Harrow at the age of sixteen the other passionate motive of his life—desire to help the unfortunate—had been implanted by the accidental sight of shocking drunken levity at the funeral of a pauper.

When he was twenty-seven he took up his first humanitarian cause in the House of Commons, and from that time the rest of his life was only a filling in with ever-increasing detail of the outline sketched thus early. Curiously enough, this road, which seems to later observers to have opened out so quickly before him, to Ashley himself appeared distressingly slow in revealing its direction. Like the young Milton he was fretting over youth's problem :

> My hasting days fly on with full career
> But my late spring no bud nor blossom sheweth,

and prematurely demanding, in depression, ' What am I good for ? I want nothing but usefulness to God and my country. . . . I cannot understand why my time is less profitably employed than the time of others.'

The desired path to usefulness was unexpectedly opened to him by the Reform Bill of 1832, which his Dorset electors had returned him to Parliament to oppose. Overshadowed by the Reform agitation, an agitation in the northern towns had been proceeding for regulation of factory hours. The Parliamentary spokesman of this movement, Sadler, lost his seat at the general election which the Reform Bill made necessary, and the ' Short Time Committees ' which led the Ten Hours Movement invited Ashley to take Sadler's place. They chose him because he had shown interest in social matters in debates, and because his distinguished position might add weight to their cause. To Ashley the invitation brought ' astonishment, doubt and terror ' ; the union between the Tory representative of rural Dorset and northern industrial agitators seemed incongruous ; some of the ' Ten Hours Men ' shared his religious views, but many were Radicals. But after ' meditation and prayer ' he accepted what appeared to be the call of duty, and entered upon a task which was to mean seventeen years of unremitting toil, carried out, inside Parliament in isolation from his natural friends, and outside, in alliance

with men who were mostly distasteful to him. Success at last came, but his enjoyment of it was marred by an unhappy ending of his relations with the Short Time Committees, which left him reflecting drearily on the ingratitude of man.

Ashley's campaign for limitation of hours in factories covered the period from 1832–1850, but when he took the matter up it had already been under discussion for twenty years, though the results achieved were not in keeping with the amount of discussion. The movement which ended in limitation of hours for all workers in all factories and, later, for all industrial workers everywhere, began on the smallest possible scale with the protection of pauper children apprenticed in the earliest mills, which need for water-power caused to spring up far from towns and so from workers. It next spread to ' free ' children who in the steam-driven mills took the place of the pauper apprentices and to ' young persons ' ; regulation was then extended to women, by the device of classing all women as ' young persons ', and the indirect effect of regulating the hours worked by children, young persons, and women, was to set limits to the hours of all adults, since men depended on the presence of the other classes of workers for ability to continue their own tasks.

Before Ashley accepted the lead of the movement to obtain a ' Ten Hours Day ', factory-owners had suffered only as much interference as came from two Acts, of very limited application, and ineffective because there was no method of enforcing even their mild regulations. In 1802 the ' Health and Morals of Apprentices Act ' first introduced outside interference into the sacred premises of mill-owners. This Act, however, applied only to pauper apprentices, who, being without natural protectors, might well be considered the particular care of the State, while its care for the paupers did not go far enough to be a serious annoyance to employers. Apart from limiting their working hours to twelve in one day, it was mostly concerned with provisions which put it in a different world from the later Factory Acts, although they all grew

out of this mild measure. A suit of clothes once a year, attendance at church once a month, a bed shared with not more than one other occupant, with other provisions for some degree of decent treatment, was all that this Act attempted to secure for the factory children. Owen, therefore, strong in the success of his experiments with shorter hours in his own mill, helped the business on to a further stage by his efforts for the Act of 1819. This Act was never put into regular force; it applied only to children in cotton mills, and, excluding those under nine altogether, it prescribed a maximum working day of twelve hours for those under sixteen. Even though amended later, it afforded slight protection even to those favoured children with whom it dealt, and, like the Act of 1802, was important rather because it had set a precedent for interference by the central authority than for any good it achieved itself.

From 1830 to 1850 Yorkshire and Lancashire agitated for a 'Ten Hours Day', intending the limitation to apply to all. The course of the agitation in the country was paralleled by pressure in Parliament and the passing of Acts in 1833, 1844 and 1847 which, while falling far short of the hopes of the 'Ten Hours Men', step by step increased the amount of protection given and enlarged the numbers of workers to whom it was given.

The movement had been begun by Oastler in a letter to a newspaper, rousing opinion to realize the horrors that were going on in factories, unsuspected even by those who lived in the factory towns. Opinion responded to such an extent that Sadler was able to secure a Select Committee to inquire into the conditions, and the witnesses he managed to bring before the Committee, by their deformed bodies, ruined health, and simple stories of suffering, made the introduction of a Bill a matter of course. At this point Sadler lost his seat, so that the Bill fell to Ashley to introduce, and it at once gave him a foretaste of the delays and disappointments that this matter was going to inflict on him. Parliament was still unwilling to embark definitely on the uncharted sea of industrial interference,

and referred the matter to a Royal Commission. Foiled by the fresh evidence taken in this attempt to evade action, the government brought in a Bill of its own which did not give the Ten Hours Day advocated by Ashley and so was looked on with suspicion by the Short Time Committees. It was, however, of great importance, both because it increased the degree of protection conferred and also because, for the first time, provisions were made for its own enforcement. It applied to all textile mills except silk and lace, it excluded children under nine years of age, it limited the hours for those under thirteen to nine in a day and for those under eighteen to twelve in a day; it decreed that those under thirteen should pass two of their working hours in schooling of some sort, and it arranged for its enforcement through government inspectors who should report to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. While Ashley accepted this compromise as worth having and the Short Time Committees cast scorn on it, Ministers deplored it as 'an evil forced on the government.' This all-round dissatisfaction is typical of the workings of outside agitation on Parliament; it secures some action, wrung from an unwilling legislature, but not the action it wants, and the Short Time Committees realized that this Act would be effective in taking the sting out of their agitation by protecting children, without in any way helping them to their goal of limitation of hours for all.

Other matters absorbed the working classes in the following years, but Ashley never allowed the matter to drop out of the mind of Parliament. The inquiry he obtained into the working of the Act of 1833, and the Commission on the whole field of child employment outside factories, united with the Chartist agitation to put the House of Commons into a frame of mind in which it yielded readily to his prompting in 1844 by introducing a new Bill. Once more the government measure fell short of the demand for a ten hours day, but at one stage in the prolonged debates on all the issues at stake Ashley had the satisfaction of securing a vote in favour of the principle

of a ten hours day. This vote was reversed at the bidding of Peel, and Ashley was at length beaten in his attempt to amend the Bill so as to embody a ten hours clause, but the Bill was a useful advance in the protection of the weaker workers. It established the 'half-time' system for the youngest class of children employed, it extended protection to women by including them in the 'young persons' whose working day was limited, and it increased the welfare of all workers by regulations about fencing dangerous machinery. It was in the debates on this Bill that the most interesting light was thrown on the points of view of parties and individuals, and the principles of interference were thoroughly threshed out. It is, however, convenient to consider these later and to trace here the Ten Hours Movement to its end, which came with the 'Ten Hours Bill' of 1847 and the supplementary measures of 1850 and 1853. This final stage did not give to Ashley the satisfaction that he deserved. By an unkind stroke of fate he was out of the House of Commons at the moment when the long-sought Ten Hours Bill at last went through, and he had quarrelled with the Short Time Committees before the final stage of legislation made the ten hours a reality in the Acts of 1850 and 1853. After the debates of 1844 it was a matter of course that a fresh Bill should renew the attack on Parliament's hostility to the ten hours day, but Ashley felt obliged to resign his seat at the very moment when the factory question offered hope, because he followed Peel in his conversion to Free Trade and so could no longer conscientiously represent his protectionist constituency. He hurriedly introduced his Bill, resigned, and handed over his task to Fielden, who made a striking leader of the movement for limiting factory hours, as he was himself a mill-owner and so a member of the class from whom came the fiercest opposition to the course his Bill advocated. This Bill was defeated, but, with a Whig Government now in power, Fielden at once introduced another Bill, and this at last went forward to victory. It must have been irksome to Ashley to be reduced to the position of an outside watcher

while the measure which was due mainly to his long-continued efforts was piloted into harbour by some one else, and the situation was rendered more tantalizing at the general election, which took place shortly after, when Fielden and Ashley once more changed places, Fielden losing his seat while Ashley gained a new one, at Bath.

After all, the rejoicings of the Short Time Committees at the passing of the Ten Hours Bill proved premature, and Ashley, back in the House of Commons, found himself faced with the dreary necessity of resuming the stale fight, in order to turn into reality a victory which experience of the Act proved to be only illusory. The wording of the Act made it possible for employers to evade its real intentions, as the ten hours of work might be spread over twelve hours. In despair of inducing the government to set this right, Ashley, without consulting his Short Time Committees, agreed to a compromise, giving an effective ten and a half hour day. His decision came to the notice of those who were his colleagues through a public letter in the Press, and, while he was soon complaining bitterly, 'They forgot all my labour of love in the middle course I took for their welfare,' it is possible to enter into the feelings of the Bradford Committee when it recorded bluntly: 'We regret to end with so little satisfaction to ourselves and so little credit to Lord Ashley a connexion so long continued.' His policy may have been right but his method might well blind the workers to its merits. There had never been the necessary trust between leader and led, and Ashley was not well fitted for working with committees who considered him as their delegate bound to consult them before acting.

Ashley's views on factory regulation were purely humanitarian, and he was deeply grieved by the arguments used by the various people who opposed what he considered a measure of mere humanity. Opposition came, from very different motives, from varied classes. Simple selfishness on the part of employers was fortified by the arguments of political economists, and the ordinary indifference to ills not actually seen received justification

from doctors who swore that factory children were not harmed by overwork in a bad atmosphere from the age of seven, and from manufacturers who pointed out that conditions in mills were no worse than conditions elsewhere. Some Members of Parliament supported Ashley on grounds of humanity. Country gentlemen supported him out of spite against the manufacturing classes, who were making themselves unpleasant by pressing for repeal of the Corn Laws, on which they held that their prosperity rested. A few were feeling their way to the modern point of view, that society as a whole is responsible for the well-being of all its parts. But the opposition included not only men with no particular interest in the welfare of the workers but those who, like Cobden and Bright, Brougham and Peel, were all doing something for the workers in other spheres. One member of the government—Graham—put the point of view of those concerned with the economic prosperity of the country to the exclusion of all else: 'The lot of the workers is but eating and drinking and working and dying.' To limit hours of work would be to 'lay the axe at the root of the tree of England's greatness'; this tree, 'though some of its fruits may be bitter, yet has produced that greatness and prosperity which make this small island most remarkable in the history of the civilized world and which, upon the whole, diffuse happiness amongst this great community'. Peel, avowedly doing all he could 'to make England a cheap country to live in', looked impatiently on Factory Acts as sentimental and partial measures for the relief of the workers and, like many others, he considered that leisure for the workers would be a danger to themselves and to the community at large. Cobden and Bright and, at first, Gladstone opposed protection for all but the youngest children, on the grounds that all others were masters of their own fates and must make their own conditions with their employers. Bright also voiced the fairly popular view that it was unreasonable to single out factories for interference, since they offered conditions that were at least as good as those in other employments, and that it

was hardly worth relieving sufferings of such a small proportion of the working population. Lord Brougham contended that children in industry already enjoyed all the protection necessary in ' that which Divine Providence had provided in the care of the parent ', and yet Brougham had been one of the best friends of the workers in the years following Waterloo. He had advocated universal education in days when it was a most unpopular cause, and had worked for the abolition of slavery and of the harsh criminal laws. Selfish manufacturers opposed the shortening of hours out of fear for their own profits—the less selfish because they honestly believed that it would ruin industry and so mean for the workers ' no bread at all ', which would surely be even worse than ' the bread of affliction '. All found support in the economists, who at one time proved by a formidable array of figures that all profits were made ' in the last hour ' and so would disappear altogether if a Ten Hours Day destroyed this ' last hour '.

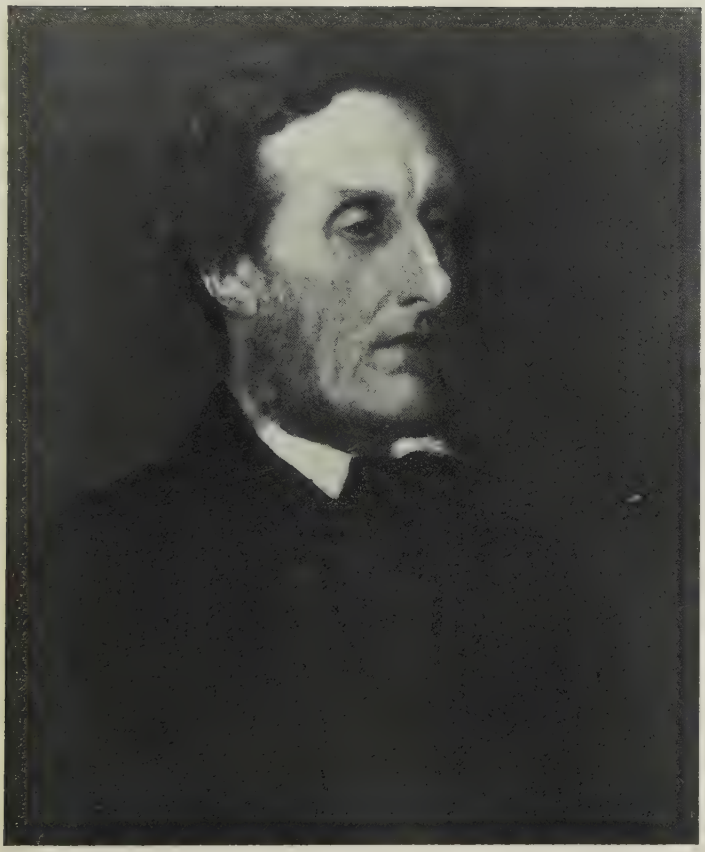
The question cut across party divisions ; Ashley was a Tory, Fielden a Radical, but many Tories, like Peel, opposed Ashley, while many Radicals believed in *laissez-faire* and so could not support State interference. Progress came very slowly in consequence, as the matter had to advance only on its own merits. Most bitter of all to Ashley was the absence of sympathy from those who shared his religious views : ' I find support from infidels, opposition from religionists,' he observed sorrowfully, and he laments his isolation, describing himself as ' a pelican in the wilderness ', a ' sparrow on the housetop '.

Opponents of his measures had one weapon for use against him which caused him the most acute mental anguish and which Bright and others did not scruple to use in the debates of 1844, when the attention of the whole country was given to the factory question, so that wide publicity was insured for the taunt. The Shaftesbury estates in Dorset were known to provide an illustration of some of the worst rural conditions that prevailed even in that notoriously bad county. It was therefore a pleasure

to a mill-owner, sore at the way in which cotton mills had been singled out for attack, to point out to the heir to estates where labourers lived on seven shillings a week, in cottages that beggared description, that reform was the kind of charity that should begin at home. These taunts were no less painful to Ashley because in his father's lifetime their bad relations prevented him from having any influence over him, while when he himself succeeded to the estates lack of money crippled his attempts to remove the grounds of reproach. 'I have passed my life,' he reflected gloomily, 'in rating others for allowing rotten housing and immoral, unhealthy conditions, and I am come into an estate rife with abominations.' He spent what he could afford on improvements, but it was too little to quieten either his own conscience or the reproaches of political opponents.

Difficulties weighed heavily on his spirits, but they left his zeal unquenched. His championship of factory children caused an ever-increasing number of other industrial victims to look to him for relief. Children in mines, in all industries carried on outside a factory, stood in as dire need of help as those in the more obvious mills. Those helpless through age or insanity were no more able to look after themselves than those helpless through youth. When his opponents thought to reduce his position to an absurdity, they ran through the list of all the other classes whose lot was no better than that of factory children, asking, scornfully, if Ashley proposed to legislate for all those. Ashley took the question seriously and answered in the affirmative, and, without even waiting for the conclusion of his first campaign, he took up the battle for other classes of children.

His most swift and dramatic success on behalf of the exploited came with the Mines Act of 1842, which forbade the employment of women and of children under ten in mines. The conditions under which women and children worked in mines were revealed in all their horror to the House of Commons by the report of the Children's Employment Commission which Ashley had secured.



ANTHONY ASHLEY-COOPER
SEVENTH EARL OF SHAFTESBURY
From the painting by G. F. Watts in the National Portrait Gallery

The effect of the revelations was so great that Ashley's Bill to end the scandals went through without opposition. To the ills that women and children in mines shared with those in mills were added the terrors of work underground and of darkness. Babies of five were found sitting alone in the dark for twelve hours a day; girls stood all day in water; women, 'chained, belted, harnessed like dogs to a go-cart', dragged heavy coal-trucks along, crawling on all-fours in the narrow passages, doing the work of horses. Many members told Ashley they envied him the speech in which he moved his Bill and his share in wiping out this blot on the humanity of the country; but, while his Bill went through the House of Commons without opposition, it was left for the House of Lords to argue that pit children were both well and happy and that the removal of them and women from the mines would ruin the mining industry, from which noble lords drew their fortunes.

This kind of work could only be done through Parliament. Private philanthropy was powerless to help the child in mill or mine; the will of the nation must issue in laws for the protection of the weak. As a member of the national legislature Ashley was in a favourable position for obtaining political measures of a humanitarian nature; he had to rouse public opinion, procure facts and give them publicity in Parliament and the country. His philanthropy was, as it were, at second hand; he had to move Parliament to do the work, to shame it, possibly, by forcing on it knowledge of facts that it would gladly have left unexplored. In this type of work Ashley spent part of his whole career, but it did not satisfy him, and he also began to enter upon more 'direct' philanthropy where, as in his work for the insane and the 'Ragged Schools', he came into personal contact with those whom he was striving to help; and in the end he came to find his highest satisfaction in the purely personal philanthropic side of his reforming activities.

One of his most uphill fights was that on behalf of the 'climbing boys' who were employed to go up chimneys,

where, in the dark, they sometimes met their death and up which they were forced to go, small and frightened, by horrible brutalities. For thirty years Ashley forced this subject on the attention of Parliament (from 1840–1875) and he had only taken on an agitation begun fifty years earlier. It needed a century of pressure to induce a government to pass laws which would save children from the cruelty which had been shown up time after time. Here he combined direct philanthropy with Parliamentary agitation, forming societies to collect cases and try to enforce what regulations existed, helping individual sweeps. Results were slow in coming, and time after time he had to return to the attack. Perseverance, however, at length brought success, and Shaftesbury had the satisfaction of getting a Bill passed which effectively ended the sufferings of the climbing boys. It is difficult to understand the determined reluctance to put a stop to this obvious evil; a mechanical brush had been invented to do the work, but it meant adapting chimneys, and property owners refused to put themselves out so far. Housewives declared that boys caused less soot in their precious rooms, and, as Mr. and Mrs. Hammond suggest, salved their consciences with gifts of food to the little sweeps. It is significant that the tender-hearted Lamb, making the young sweeps —' tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek '— the subject of an essay, accepts their lot as inevitable. He urges the kindly to drop a penny into the sweep's black hand or to find him a hot drink if ' it be starving weather and to the proper troubles of his hard occupation a pair of kibed heels be superadded '; but there is no hint that anyone is responsible for his ' hard occupation ' or that he could be rescued from it.

Shaftesbury performed services for many other classes of young people; ' acrobatic children ', flower girls, watercress sellers, and costers were among those who benefited by the largeness of his heart and his untiring sacrifice of leisure and pleasure. He added still another

type of social work to these, when the Board of Health was first formed to deal with the hideous problems of overcrowded towns, destitute of water supply, sewers, and adequate burial grounds. Benthamite agitation secured a Public Health Bill in 1848, and Lord Ashley was one of the Commissioners appointed to work the new Act. Many repellent tasks fell to him in the course of his various activities, but none worse than those dictated by his conscientious carrying out of the Public Health Act. He insisted on acquiring first-hand knowledge of the cholera-breeding slums, he wrestled with landlords of insanitary houses, and strove to force cleanliness on reluctant slum-dwellers. And his services were rewarded by the abolition of the Board, which had made itself remarkably unpopular, so that he felt himself ungratefully 'cast aside like a piece of useless lumber'.

More satisfactory to himself was his lifelong work for the insane, which alone would entitle him to a high place in the ranks of benefactors of humanity. Here his task was partly to move Parliament and partly to humanize the treatment of the insane by authorities, and he was faithful to his self-appointed duty for nearly sixty years. The protection and treatment of the insane bristles with difficulties, and when Ashley took up the matter in 1828 years of pressure from humanitarians had achieved little. The insane who were rich were shut up in private houses, where every sort of unscrupulousness was practised; for the poor there was no provision, except in an ordinary hospital like the famous 'Bedlam'. It was easy to get an unwanted rich relation confined and impossible to ensure decently humane treatment for any lunatic. The horrors that he found when, in his capacity of Chairman of the Lunacy Commissioners, he inspected 'madhouses', affected both his health and spirits. His first experiences led him to frame a Bill for ending the worst abuses to which this most wretched class of world's unfortunates was subject. This Bill is best known as 'the Shaftesbury Act', and it was the foundation on which has been built all subsequent legislation for the

protection of the insane. Progress beyond the first step was slow, but his Act made a beginning ; it became harder to shut up inconvenient people wrongfully ; county asylums were provided for the poor, and private asylums had to be registered and inspected. Violence and cruelty lessened, partly through the inspecting of asylums by the Commission of which Shaftesbury was chairman, and there was a steadily increasing recognition of the claims of the insane to comfort and humane treatment. Till the end of his life Shaftesbury continued this work, inspecting, reporting, and thinking of the welfare of the insane ; but towards the end his satisfaction in the work was dimmed in the way that so often happens when one who was once a pioneer carries on the work for so long a time that the very success of his own pioneering educates up a new generation of enthusiasts, who, starting where he left off, call for further movement. Shaftesbury saw this process and took it as criticism of his life's work ; he blocked reform projects on the grounds that reform had gone far enough and came near to resigning his chairmanship. Fortunately, the best friend the insane had ever had was prevented from severing his connexion with lunacy work by the accident of a change of government, and the fifty-seven-year record of devoted labour was unbroken at his death.

This part of his work illustrates the passionate thoroughness which he brought to every duty. Not content with the routine inspection of madhouses that formed part of his work as a Commissioner, he broke through his strict ' Sunday observance ' in order to pay surprise visits, which confirmed his suspicions that the attendants on the lunatics went off work for the week-end, leaving their victims uncared-for. Similarly he went to watch climbing boys at work, saw for himself that they slept among the soot ; went through mills, good and bad ; went down mines ; and spent nights prowling about the odd corners of London where the homeless sought shelter. He always acquired, at first hand, knowledge of the conditions he meant to describe and to improve ; it was,

he said, easier to talk of what you have seen ; ' one whiff of Cowyard . . . outweighs pages of letterpress '.

To-day Lord Shaftesbury's name is perhaps most frequently seen in connexion with the Shaftesbury ' Training Ships ' for poor boys and the Shaftesbury Homes, established in poor parts for receiving the homeless. These are relics of the philanthropic work in which he found more pleasure than in his Parliamentary agitation. He first took part in this work during his absence from Parliament after the Repeal of the Corn Laws, when he offered help to a small band of enthusiasts who were struggling to establish ' Ragged Schools ' for the rescue of the most degraded of the slum dwellers. His zeal and influence infused life into the movement ; the work became widely known, funds and patrons were found, and for the rest of his life Shaftesbury spent some of his happiest hours among the young outcasts. He had a particular gift for winning their confidence, and many boys and girls owed to him a new start in life, in England or in the colonies. The Ragged Schools opened to him many by-ways among the worst slums ; he learnt from mixing with those who came from them the needs for better housing, slum clearance, and the provision of decent lodging-house accommodation for working men, and on this experience he was able to base useful measures. The discouragements met with in trying to move Parliament were absent from this personal work among the unfortunate. Ragged School teachers and pupils were easier to get on with than Short Time Committees ; the human contact with his reclaimed thieves and similar young people satisfied his sympathies, and he came to pass more and more of his time in such ' social work '. It is interesting to note that Dr. Barnardo was one of the Ragged School teachers.

Shaftesbury was a friend of the working class, but he was an autocrat and an aristocrat. He was happy to give his life to improving the material lot of the poor, but he had no sympathy with their political ambitions, and his attitude to them would have been offensive had they

known it. He was no believer in 'self-help' nor in 'votes for all'. He opposed the extension of the franchise, he opposed the secret ballot; his view of Trade Unions ran thus: 'All the single despots, all the aristocracies that ever were or will be, are as puffs of wind compared with those tornadoes, Trade Unions.' Chartism and Socialism he described as 'the two great demons of modern politics stalking through the land'. His experience had taught him that these 'two demons' sprang from bad conditions, but his turn of mind prevented him from allowing that the victims should be encouraged to secure their own redress. Democracy was abhorrent to him; a Sanitary Bill, he once said, would confer more blessing on the working class in five years than universal suffrage in half a century. This point of view caused him to ask, in later life: 'Is it worth while going on labouring? The working classes can and do fight their own battles.' Education in itself never roused his interest; his Ragged Schools were places of social and moral reform first and last; and when the Education Act of 1871 put education within the reach of every child for the first time, Shaftesbury felt only regret for his old schools and fear that 'the Godless, non-Bible system is at hand . . . and the Ragged School movement must finish under this all-conquering march of intellect'.

While philanthropic interests dominated his mind they did not altogether exclude everything else. 'Private affairs and public affairs, the Danube and house drainage, Ragged Schools and the kings of the East, the National Exchequer and my own', is an entry in his Diary, showing that his Parliamentary life kept him active over a wide range of affairs. Entries appear about Italian politics, Afghanistan, American slavery, but the largest share is given to religious topics. On behalf of his own severely Protestant Anglicanism he would fling himself into religious controversies as ardently as on behalf of ill-used children, and he found religious danger everywhere—in the Oxford Movement and High Church reformers, in the growth of Roman Catholicism, in the rise of the Salvation

Army : ' Where,' he demanded scornfully, ' is a Bible warrant for Hallelujah and Salvation Lasses ? ' But a greater source of sorrow than these came from the conflict between the new scientific discoveries, summed up in the names of Darwin and Evolution, and the belief in the literal truth of every word of the Scriptures. He asserted that his belief in the ' literal truth ' was so complete that he dared challenge the scientists to investigate to their hearts' content, sure that it would result only in added proof : ' It will prove the Mosaic creation, it will establish the Deluge and Noah's ark ' ; but his trust apparently wavered at times. He broke a lifelong connexion with the S.P.C.K. because it published a book on geology, an ' infidel ' science ; he even went so far as to describe a book dealing with the Bible in a ' rationalizing ' manner as ' the most pestilential book ever vomited from the jaws of Hell ', while he saw in the proposal to revise the Authorized Version of the Bible ' one of the most subtle dangers that beset religion '.

The deep religious fervour that gave birth to these views was the moving force of his work, yet it added greatly to the cares of life. He enjoyed no spiritual peace, no security that his work was acceptable. Puritan mistrust of pleasure left him finally unable to indulge in the recreation necessary for health and spirits. Life appeared to him so real and earnest that he became obsessed with its gloomy side. If he sought refreshment for his wearied spirit abroad he could not refrain from taking advantage of the opportunity of inspecting foreign institutions (on one occasion even Paris slaughter-houses), in the hope of learning improved methods for English institutions. Dining out ceased to give him pleasure because he was harassed by the sight of the wasteful superfluity of food which was so sadly needed elsewhere. Switzerland failed to restore him to health because of his remorseful fretting on behalf of invalids whose poverty cut them off from such means of regaining strength. All this led to over-sensitive nerves and feelings. Troubles appeared exaggerated ; he dwelt on his loneliness and felt

himself unpopular and neglected: 'Bulls of Bashan on every side' is one entry in his Diary, which no doubt expressed a familiar state of mind. The narrow dogmatism of his religion was distasteful to some who otherwise sympathized with his work, so it cut him off from possible colleagues; it also lessened his power of appreciating the work of men who did not share his religious views, so that of the services of Dickens for suffering humanity he somewhat doubtingly wrote: 'Though not putting [his social work] on Christian principles, he may have been, in God's singular and unfathomable goodness, as much the servant of the Most High.' He worried acutely because other men did not share his conviction of the overwhelming importance of religion in every detail of life; he was concerned that the great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace contained no exhibits directly bearing on religion; he felt discouraged that the dispatches sent by Lord Raglan from the Crimean War were 'so cold and thankless to Almighty God'.

In one way his religious views brought upon him great unpopularity. He fought doggedly to limit both work and play on Sundays; he induced the government to stop Sunday posts for a short time, though the outcry was so strong that they were soon restored, and he succeeded in preventing bands from playing in parks and museums from being opened on Sundays. 'Press and society teem with vituperation and hatred,' he noted, but he was unmoved. He exerted all his influence to further the material welfare of those whose chance of recreation was for the most part limited to Sunday, and he helped to secure a weekday half-holiday, but he was quite clear that moral as well as bodily health must be attended to, and for that purpose Sunday must be kept free from all distractions.

The wide area over which Shaftesbury's public life ranged suggests that little leisure can have been left for private pursuits. In his home he found complete happiness, overshadowed only by the early death of some of his

children. His family grew up in an atmosphere that contrasted in every way with his own neglected childhood, and his wife entered into close co-operation with him in all his public schemes. When contemplating marriage he entered in his Diary, 'Give me the mother of the Gracchi exalted by the Gospel,' and this oddly expressed ideal appears to have been realized to his satisfaction, despite the misgivings felt about the match by his wife's relations, one of whom asked indignantly, 'What has poor Min done to deserve such a Fate?' These fears proved unwarranted, and his wife's circle, which included both Lord Melbourne and Lord Palmerston, accepted the Evangelical stranger into their gayer family life, while Palmerston became a friend who increased Shaftesbury's influence and probably helped to counteract his gloomy tendencies and over-earnest application to serious things.

The bad relations with his father, which worried him intermittently, were only replaced on his father's death in 1851 by the worries of managing impoverished estates and the disadvantages to his public work of his removal to the Upper House. He had no gift for the work of a great landowner: 'How,' he demanded pathetically, 'can I at fifty years of age learn other things? Land, rent, etc., are as Arabic to me.' He was forced to depend on agents; and as he was unfortunate in his choice of them, the succession to those estates with which his enemies taunted him brought him mainly debts, lawsuits, and public criticism.

He found another source of personal distress in his failure to achieve high political office. To posterity, seeing him safe in his niche in the temple of the nation's great men, such regrets seem futile; but not all his struggles against worldly ambition could save him from feeling humiliated every time a Tory Ministry was formed and he was left out. An early minor office and consciousness of a distinguished position in Parliament, led him to expect official recognition on a worthy scale, so that when Peel offered him only a Court appointment, in which, as he bitterly said, 'only his legs would be of service', he

brooded in disappointment, though assuring himself that 'had I not, by God's grace and the study of religion, subdued the passion of my youth, I should now have been heartbroken'. In later wisdom he decided that official position would hamper him in agitating for reforms, so that he refused offers from Lord Derby and Lord Palmerston and only under pressure accepted the Garter from the Queen. Recognition came in plenty in later years, but he was always inclined to underestimate it; even when he enjoyed the confidence of the Queen, when freedom of cities and testimonials and gifts poured in, he still complained of his isolation. In reality both parties, in both Houses, joined in acknowledging the value of his work. On his departure for the Upper House, the House of Commons agreed that he had proved himself 'the friend of the friendless', and that 'every form of human suffering he has, in this House, sought to lighten, and out of this House his exertions have been such as might have seemed incompatible with his duties here'. Lord Russell, a Liberal, declared there was no man living who had done so much to promote the welfare of the working classes, and Lord Beaconsfield, a Tory, expressed a similar opinion: 'The name of Lord Shaftesbury will descend to posterity as one who has, in his generation, worked more than any other individual to elevate the condition and raise the character of the working class'. Ragged Schools sent him a portrait, factory operatives forgot past grievances and gave a bust of himself, and grateful costers actually presented him with a live donkey in a public meeting.

Shaftesbury once claimed for himself 'only feeling, conviction, perseverance', but if this modesty must be allowed it is clear that he had these qualities in a degree so intense that they amounted to vision and originality. 'Feeling' made him see society as it was, with all its abuses and inhumanity, viewed, not through the distorting glass of self-interest, political creed, or economic theory, but through sympathy grounded in Christian charity. 'Perseverance' carried him through the work

prompted by his 'feeling', however exhausting and discouraging it must be. 'Conviction' was so earnest that it enabled him to win others to his ideas and to persuade a national legislature to adopt his desired reforms. The three qualities together prevented him from ever resting content with achievements; when he had obtained some measure of protection for the bulk of factory workers his only thought was, 'there are still four hundred thousand women and children to be brought under protection'; and when death was approaching he protested, 'I cannot bear to leave the world with all the suffering in it.' After his death the streets of London witnessed a moving tribute to the amount of human suffering that had been alleviated by his efforts, in the procession of all ranks of the world's unfortunates who felt that his death was the death of a friend.

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CHAPTER VI

RICHARD COBDEN

1804–1865

THE two remaining reformers, Cobden and Bright, viewed social problems from an entirely different angle. Shaftesbury desired to relieve immediate social abuses by laws, Place wanted to set the exploited on their own feet so that they could relieve themselves from oppression, Owen proposed to re-distribute wealth so as to eliminate inequality, Cobbett thought the key to the Golden Age lay in political and financial reform. But Cobden and Bright considered that all these projects were mere tinkering with evil—attempts to cure symptoms of the disease but not causes. The one effective cure, they held, was to free trade from all protective regulation; if foreign corn were allowed in the country, food would be cheaper, and that would be like more money for the working class; if raw material from abroad could be imported freely employment would be increased, and so the unemployed would grow fewer; a working class thus employed, at a higher wage, would be independent of schemes like Owen's or philanthropy like Shaftesbury's. So far the two men went together; but while Bright parted company with Cobden when he added to the need for Free Trade that for extending the franchise, Cobden enlarged the scope of his Free Trade campaign so as to include the international peace, which would, he hoped, prelude world-wide Free Trade.

Cobden's name is known to most people to-day as that of 'the Manchester man', the cotton-spinner whose life was closely bound up with the manufacturing interests of the newly-arisen industrialist class, the leader of the Free Trade movement. Yet the 'Manchester man'

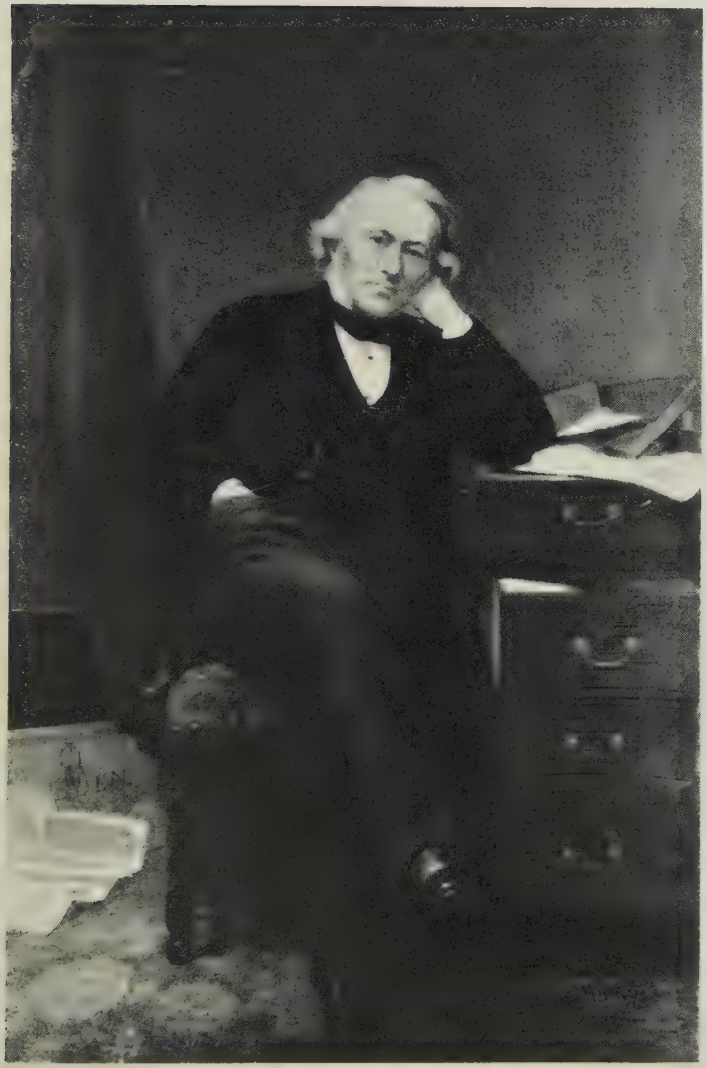
sprang, like Cobbett, from a farm-house in the south of England, and all his life he kept his 'country' aspect, so that the first sight of the cotton-spinner came as a surprise to most people. His public work necessarily had its centre in Manchester and London, but for a large part of his life it had a background of country, and when out of Parliament for a time, and towards the end of life, when ill-health interfered with public duties, he reported himself to be 'deep in mangolds and pigs' on his Hampshire farm.

He was less fortunate than Cobbett in not being allowed to grow up among farm delights and in a family circle. The vigour which for generations had kept his family in an independent position failed in his father, and, while the family were forced to sell the farm and drifted fruitlessly about in search of a livelihood, Richard was sent by an uncle to a school in distant Yorkshire. 'Ill-fed, ill-used, ill-taught,' he lived in unhappy exile, until 1819, when the same uncle moved him from school to his own warehouse. The warehouse pleased him not at all, nor did he please his uncle; but when he was twenty-one life at last began to shape itself more to his taste, and he was promoted from the monotony of a warehouse to the variety of the road; he became, in short, a commercial traveller, or a 'bagman' in the phrase of his own day. The career would not be every young man's idea of paradise, but it offered great attractions to Cobden's quick curiosity about men and things. No doubt that silver-tongued persuasiveness that was later to argue the Corn Laws out of existence made him a successful traveller, but it is also worth noticing that the eager young man found other things 'on the road' to interest him besides possible customers; he sighed for the lack of leisure to grow 'deep skilled in the mysteries of architraves and mullions in lieu of black and purple pin-grounds', showing a side to his character that had disgusted his uncle, who disapproved of his attempts to fill in the gaps left by the education of the Yorkshire school by teaching himself French in bed at night.

Like thousands of young men of initiative of those days,

he sought independence by adding industry to commerce and setting up in a partnership richer in hope than capital. His firm, after first selling cotton goods, took also to printing them, and Cobden now became a ' Manchester man ', dealing in cotton or ' Manchester ' goods and living in the town. Like many of these same young men, too, he soon found an interest in local politics ; but he went farther afield, writing a play and two pamphlets on political problems, and travelling both in Europe and in the United States. He further showed himself not quite the ordinary young man by the able way in which he took advantage of all chances to observe foreign habits, both governmental and commercial. In Egypt he had interviews with the ruler Mehemet Ali, and learnt from him details of cotton growing, while he exchanged ideas with well-informed men in France and elsewhere. Like Gladstone with his Diary, Cobden committed all his experiences and many of his thoughts to letters, and, in the busiest days, always found time to write. He was particularly interested in America, and was one of the earliest of public men in England to see that the United States was rapidly becoming of immense importance to Europe, and that in the near future English affairs and commerce would inevitably have to take the States into all calculations. On this first visit he notes, ' This people are the most insatiable gourmands of praise and flattery,' and that ' All is done in pursuit of economy of time—speed, speed, speed.'

In 1838, in his thirty-fourth year, he may be considered to have reached the close of the preparatory stage of his life. Prosperous in business, his character formed by experience, travel, and hard study, with some standing in local circles gained by efforts in securing for Manchester its Corporation under the new Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, he was now fitted to move from the local to the national platform. In that year he took the step that was to lead him to a high place in public life—he joined the Free Trade movement with which he was to become so completely identified.



RICHARD COBDEN

From the painting by L. C. Dickinson in the National Portrait Gallery

It may be noted, in passing, that while in the public career now opening out before him Cobden went from strength to strength, his private prosperity was only transient. He was harassed by financial worries nearly all his life; at the very crisis of the Free Trade fight he would have been obliged to withdraw in order to save himself from ruin, had not Bright learnt the facts in time and succeeded in organizing Cobden's admirers in a scheme for raising the necessary money. He was struggling to keep his head above water at the moment when an opponent taunted him with making a yearly profit of £3,000 out of the trade that Cobden asserted was suffering from the Corn Laws. And twice more friends had to come to his rescue with generous gifts, finally freeing him from the trammels of his business altogether and setting him up with his loved farm. It is odd that the man who, in public affairs, seemed the embodiment of that particular form of ability distinguished as 'business ability' should have failed to make good use of it in his private affairs. His experience joins with that of Owen, Place, and Shaftesbury to suggest that few men find it possible to look after their own and public affairs. Cobden was seldom at hand with a free mind to give to his firm's affairs, and his family affection led him to withdraw from his first prosperous venture in order to find a place for a brother who inherited the father's fatal incapacity to succeed; his incapacity combined with Cobden's absorption in other things to make failure certain.

The Free Trade movement made up almost the whole of Cobden's life between 1839 and 1846, but he was not its originator. Economists and Radicals had for some time held the theoretical view that the country would benefit by the application of Adam Smith's teaching to agriculture and industry, and the first Association for the purpose of freeing corn from duties was formed by them in London in 1837, without much success. Manchester took up the idea in 1839 and soon turned it from a theoretical view into a practical plan, and Cobden was

one of the first members of the Association which later combined with all other local associations to form the Anti-Corn Law League.

Repeal of the Corn Law was only one part of the Free Trade movement, but because of the special importance of taxes on food, and because of the exciting career of the League itself, it is the aspect which has attracted most interest. In an earlier age all nations ' protected ' their home products by customs duties on foreign goods, using the duties as weapons in diplomacy. With every change of national policy, therefore, with every war and every peace, the duties might be altered, growing ever more complicated and confused, so that a minister like Walpole, interested in fiscal efficiency, found a perfect tangle of duties which impeded trade and at a maximum cost and inconvenience produced a minimum of benefit. Walpole pruned, arranged, and simplified, and later Adam Smith supplied a theory for such reforms ; his pupils Pitt, Huskisson, and Peel put his theory into practice so far as industrial protection was concerned. The complications of the system when an attack was first made on it can be gauged from Peel's statement that when he took up the work there were still 1,150 different rates of duties imposed on a vast number of articles. And this was after Huskisson had made a beginning in the process of ' tariff reform '. Huskisson, when he was at the Board of Trade between 1823 and 1827, substituted low duties for high, moderate duties for prohibition, and allowed import of many raw materials at rates that were purely nominal. The efforts of Huskisson between 1823 and 1827, and of Peel before 1845, resulted in the freeing of practically all articles from protection except corn.

Corn was thus treated differently from all other articles, but reasons could be advanced for this special treatment ; the nation depended on corn for its existence, the land on which it grew supplied the governing class with its income, and the Act protecting corn was not a relic of an ancient system but the expression of a recent and

deliberate policy. The Corn Law, which was to become a household word, had been passed at the end of the Napoleonic Wars by a landlord Parliament, in the interest of landowners. During the war the government, faced with a scarcity of food, urged on the people, like a later government, the need to ' eat less bread ', and on farmers the need to cultivate every scrap of ground that could be made capable of bearing corn. Bad harvests between 1797–1801, and again between 1810–1813, coinciding with the cessation of supplies from Dantzig and Odessa, sent prices up so high that it paid the farmers to till soil that was normally considered too poor for cultivation. The nation's necessity meant prosperity to landlords and farmers, who consequently laid their plans on the assumption that existing conditions were permanent.

Peace brought their schemes toppling about their ears, and the Board of Agriculture soon had dismal reports of ' bankruptcies, seizures, executions, imprisonments, farmers becoming paupers ', and Cobbett described the dreary sight of ' scores of young men, framed by Nature to be athletic, and rosy-cheeked and bold . . . thin as herrings, dragging their feet after them, pale as a ceiling and sneaking about like beggars '. Agricultural distress was sure of a sympathetic hearing from a Parliament dominated by landowners and led by statesmen anxious to keep the country as nearly self-sufficing as possible and in 1815 the Corn Law was passed, forbidding the import of corn until home-grown corn reached a very high price.

In the thirty years of its existence this Corn Law was always a storm-centre of criticism and dispute. It soon became clear that it was no guarantee of agricultural prosperity. Distress was at least as acute in 1821 as in 1815, and conditions constantly called for inquiry. The Law was modified, a sliding scale took the place of the earlier prohibition, and that in turn was modified. No modification made the Law work, and neither Huskisson nor Peel succeeded in improving the condition of agriculture, which gave grounds for the famous complaint of

the anonymous labourer: 'I be protected and I be starving.'

When, therefore, the League put forward its definite policy of 'total repeal of the Corn Law' the question had been already under discussion for years. As with the Radical movement for Reform of Parliament, the first stirrings had appeared in the eighteenth century, but that early movement had been mainly theoretical, and the matter only became urgent with the advent to power of a class which felt practical harm from protection. The struggle for Free Trade was one aspect of the trial of strength between the landed and the industrial classes. One stage in this trial had been reached in the battle for Parliamentary Reform in 1832, and a further victory for industry was certain, since England was clearly deserting the paths of agriculture for those of industry and so must subordinate the interests of the land to the mill. The strength of the opposition to Free Trade and the slowness of the victory, testify to the slowness with which the transition was taking place.

The Free Trade movement derives further interest also from its close connexion with the general movement towards complete *laissez-faire*. As Professor Lilian Knowles asks: 'If the government is not to protect the national food, what argument can there be for its interference in any sphere?' The League in part owed its success to the prevailing conviction that the limits of State interference should be drawn as narrowly as possible, and by its success in removing one more matter from government regulation it also contributed to still further lessening of the sphere of the State.

To Cobden 'Free Trade' was a mighty principle, of almost religious sanctity: 'A moral, even a religious spirit,' he thought, might 'be infused into this topic,' and he asserted that Free Trade was like gravitation—a universal law, deep in the nature of things. He looked at the new big towns, fuller of people every week, all needing to be fed; he saw the food-producing country-side being ever more and more eaten up by these same towns,

and side by side with these developments he set the fact that the government kept out of England by law the foreign corn that was needed to feed the people. He further observed that England was full of unemployed, starving or kept alive only by the Poor Law at public expense ; dear food aggravated their lot, and the restrictions on foreign raw material partly accounted for their unemployment, while their unemployment in turn worsened trade by making them unable to buy anything. The world was a changed place, he saw, and old ways were no longer suited to new needs. In free circulation of all goods throughout the world he found the right policy for the changed conditions. Free import of foreign corn and foreign raw materials would make the ' Hungry Forties ' hungry no more ; no longer would the wretched Chancellor of the Exchequer be found as Disraeli imaginatively pictured him, ' In a lamentable position . . . seated on an empty chest by the side of a bottomless deficiency, fishing for a Budget.' The aspect of Free Trade which particularly engaged his attention was the repeal of the law forbidding the import of corn. Cheap food was the first essential, and from the very cheapening would flow the desired improvement in trade, since we should have to pay foreigners for the corn by sending them our manufactures.

The apostolic fervour with which Cobden and his friends preached Free Trade as a principle is somewhat amazing to present-day opinion, which sees in it an economic policy rather than a sacred truth. Even as an economic policy it may well have been expedient at that day, and in those circumstances, without having that universal validity which Cobden claimed for it. But it was this passionate conviction of its value that made the Free Trade leaders so effective in converting the nation to this new teaching ; had they seen in it only a commercial policy their success would have been doubtful.

Cobden's Free Trade ideal was, later, to take him far afield from England ; but England was his first concern,

and for seven years his eye was fixed steadily on home affairs and in particular on the Corn Law, which, passed in 1815 and modified in 1828, continued to work badly, whatever its form. The ' Seven Years' War ' for free import of corn reached its climax between 1843 and 1846 and resulted in ' the conversion of millions ' to a new economic policy, the repeal of an Act that was in the interest of the most powerful class in the country by a Parliament dominated by that class, and the reversal of national policy on a vital point.

To this end Cobden contributed more than any other individual, while the combination of him and Bright was the main cause of the success of the Anti-Corn Law League. Cobden's chief weapon was his gift for organizing opinion and campaigns, for raising money, and for speaking so as to convert opinion. A subject like Free Trade is not, at first sight, calculated to catch the public interest ; facts and figures have to be grasped, abstract lines of argument followed, hoary prejudices set aside, but the conversion of the nation had to be accomplished before the House of Commons could be moved. The House was roused to careless mirth by the first proposal that, at the request of the despised industrial class, it should set aside the Corn Law, in which so many of its members saw not only the bulwark of the country but of their own prosperity and their own class domination. It was described as ' the maddest, wildest scheme that ever entered the mind of man '. This unpromising opening only set Cobden reflecting that the attitude of the House must be attacked by bringing public opinion to bear on it, since it was public opinion that had always extorted beneficial changes from Parliament. Public opinion was not ' Free Trade ' by conviction, but he was serenely certain that all it needed was a little educating. The Parliamentary heavens might appear to the casual observer to be of brass, but the year 1841 showed to Cobden that the cloud no bigger than a man's hand had appeared on the political horizon. In that year Cobden himself was returned to the House of Commons, so that

the Free Trade cause now had, as it were, a footing within the enemy's camp, and the voice of the free traders could at least be heard inside the walls. He found, too, an ally in Bright at that time. But, most important of all, in that year Sir Robert Peel became Prime Minister. Peel, it is true, led the Protectionist party, but Cobden had watched him; he remembered that in less responsible days Peel had declared that the Corn Law could only be continued 'so long as it was shown to be compatible with the prosperity, not only of the landed class but also of the nation as a whole', and Cobden was confident of his power to persuade Peel that the Corn Law had long failed to fulfil this condition.

Throughout Peel's ministry the Anti-Corn Law League loomed ever more largely on the political field, and its methods of making itself felt were the work mainly of Cobden. In Parliament and out, in towns and villages, in Drury Lane Theatre and on carts in country market-places he carried on the business of educating and converting the country to the Free Trade belief. His arguments were specially aimed, at different times, at artisans, at agricultural labourers, at tradespeople, at clerks, even at farmers. At first meetings were interrupted; in some places no one would lend a room for a meeting; but opposition lessened and converts grew. The written word was used to reinforce spoken argument in this unprecedented task of 'educating twenty-seven millions'; pamphlets, a critic notes contemptuously, 'were crammed under the doors of Dorset labourers'; nine tons of paper were used in one year, Cobden states, and the new conveniences of trains and penny post were enlisted in the service of the 'economic missionaries' who toured the country. In Manchester, head-quarters poured forth an inexhaustible flow of facts and telling stories for the use of speakers; £100,000 was raised in one year. There was a Free Trade Bazaar; 'tea-parties with lecture' catered for one class of taste, while the *Free Trade Circular* pressed the cause in prose and verse, with fact and figures. There was an indignant outcry against the

activities of the League ; the ' suppression of this unconstitutional and dangerous ' body was called for, but *The Times* (which stood by itself in those days as the sole representative of the main body of middle-class and upper-class opinion) gradually passed from an attitude of contemptuous dismissal to one of tolerant interest.

Inside Parliament the same monotonous ' booming ' went on, and began to worry many members. Cobden showed exasperating ingenuity in finding a Free Trade moral to point the most unlikely tales ; whatever the topic under debate he could always find some peg on which to hang an exposure of the bad effects of Protection. When education was discussed he pointed out that it was wasteful folly to feed the mind while the body was starved through the dearness of food ; when emigration was proposed as a cure for unemployment he observed that cheapening of food by Repeal would both feed the workers and keep them and their skill in England ; factory laws gave him an obvious opening, while game law debates were specially adapted to his needs. Cobden was truly, as Gladstone foretold, ' a worrying man on corn '.

Once, in the House, Cobden ' with his arch smile ', observed, ' Honourable Members hardly appear to understand the difference between a spinning and a print works.' In the ' League years ' he made it his business to see that Honourable Members were made to understand many differences of this sort, which seemed to their more aristocratic minds sordid and unworthy ; they found themselves unable to avoid taking in numbers of unpalatable facts. They learnt, among other things, that the ' bread tax ' meant only a tax of a halfpenny in one hundred pounds on the household budget of a rich family, while it amounted to 20 per cent on that of a labouring household ; they learnt that Dorset labourers, ' protected ', presumably, by the Corn Law, earned six shillings a week ; that in one place labourers were living on nettles ; that in one town a hundred wedding rings had been pawned in a single week to buy food ; that a

working-class household spent, all told, thirty shillings a year on manufactured goods, so drying up that demand for factory products which should provide employment. No one has ever had a better eye than Cobden for the telling fact—the fact which leads by itself to an obvious ' Free Trade ' conclusion ; and it was largely this knack that made him able to congratulate himself complacently on being ' a frequent thorn in the side of Sir Robert Peel ', and, he might have added, of the Protectionist Members of the House of Commons in general.

The governing classes might sneer at ' capering mercenaries who go frisking about the country ' ; Honourable Members might deplore ' money-grubbers ' and ' commercial swindlers ', but one man was listening closely to the ' friskers ' inside the House and a nation was being converted outside. The Prime Minister was attending to the facts and corrosive arguments marshalled by Cobden, and they were eating away the foundations of his belief in the Corn Laws ; there came the famous day when, at the end of Cobden's speech, Peel murmured to his neighbour, ' You must answer this. I cannot.'

But things went on unchanged for the moment. Peel, by his Budget, was steadily decreasing the Protectionist element in everything but agriculture ; trade improved, and, with more prosperity, the urgency of repeal lessened, so that to outward view the League's cause languished in the year that preceded its great triumph. Cobden was hard at work on a new plan of increasing the Free Traders in Parliament, by qualifying as ' freehold voters ' in the counties all who could buy the necessary quantity of land, and raising funds for the purpose. But he—and Disraeli—saw the true inwardness of the position. ' Three weeks of showery weather when the wheat is in bloom or ripening,' Cobden shrewdly declared, would repeal the Corn Laws. The rain came, so did the failure of the potato crop on which Ireland should have fed, and, at the moment when the English food supply was scarce, that of Ireland failed entirely and England had either to let her starve or to let foreign corn enter freely to feed her.

The League had put the Corn Laws at the mercy of the weather, and had also made a temporary suspension of the law impossible by rousing too much public opinion to allow it ever to be put back if once relaxed. Peel repealed the law that kept foreign corn out and England has been a ' Free Trade ' country ever since, increasingly unable to grow enough food for her dense population and so inevitably dependent for existence on supplies from overseas : ' Our myriad islands fed by other lands,' as Tennyson disapprovingly puts it.

The Anti-Corn Law League is one of the most interesting agitations that the country has ever seen ; it was prolonged, peaceful, and effective, thus contrasting at some point with all other big agitations, and its character was shaped by Cobden more than by anyone else. He and the ' Cause ' were remarkably suited to each other ; Cobden might truly say, ' I care more for the moral sentiment than the £ s. d. of this question ' ; but he took care to appeal to the large number of whom £ s. d. was the primary consideration, and Free Trade was won mainly because, as Lord Morley points out in his *Life of Cobden*, it touched the pockets of the most powerful industrialists while rousing the fervour of others as an inspiring general principle. Cobden knew how to win the support both of those susceptible to the call of humanity and of those to whom self-interest made the stronger appeal.

It is not to be supposed that he alone contributed that ' daily deposit of other men's opinions ' which Disraeli bitingly said Peel was peculiarly prone to receive ; nor was the League the only factor in repeal of the Corn Law. Circumstances played an important part. Bright was an essential element in the leadership, and the League numbered many other able men. But Peel no doubt had grounds for his estimate of Cobden's part, made in his last speech in the House of Commons : ' The name which ought to be associated with the success of these measures is the name of the man who, acting, I believe, from pure and disinterested motives, has advocated their cause with

untiring energy, by appeals to reason, expressed by an eloquence the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned . . . is the name of Richard Cobden. Without scruple I attribute the success of these measures to him.'

The League was suspended immediately repeal had been secured, but repeal came gradually, so that a watchful eye was necessary until 1849, when the progress was completed, and even after that Cobden and his colleagues felt that their victory was not perfectly assured until the Protectionist wing of the Tory party, led by Disraeli, had shown what it would do when it came back to power. In 1852 Disraeli became Chancellor of the Exchequer, and as he had accused Peel of all the worst political crimes when he had gone over to Free Trade ideas, it seemed reasonable to expect that he would restore Protection. Disraeli, however, soon set at rest the apprehensions of the Free Traders; the government, he airily declared, had more important duties than the wasting of time on 'exploded economic theories'. Fault might be found with this attitude, but not by the League. Cobden could now look on Free Trade as secure in England, and could turn his attention outside England, to the world-wide application of his ideal.

Cobden called Free Trade 'the International Law of the Almighty', and, as soon as his own country's economic house had been set in order, he worked for the re-shaping of England's foreign policy and of European affairs along the same lines; in this aim he spent most of the rest of his life. He looked out on Europe with a 'modern' eye; he saw that a new world was being born, with the development of machinery and growth of commerce; men's and nations' interests were changing too, bringing need for corresponding change in policy. 'The policy of the cudgel was out of date'; all nations wanted trade, and in its free flow lay the secret of prosperity for all; war was an obstacle to this flow, therefore war was no longer in anyone's interests, since these interests were now mutual and best secured by Commercial Treaties and

understandings. Once more Cobden saw two sides to Free Trade ; it was an expedient for increasing prosperity of nations, but at the same time it must lead to peace and ' the Brotherhood of man '. With much fervour he prophesied that it would mean ' the breaking down of barriers that separate nations, those barriers behind which nestle the feelings of pride, of revenge, of hatred and jealousy which now and then deluge whole countries with blood '. And he was confident in the infectious example of England ; in a few years, he asserted, there would not be a tariff left in Europe. He might, in fact, almost have adopted the boast of Pitt during the wars with France, and have said, ' England has saved herself [in economic affairs] by her exertions, and will, I trust, save Europe by her example.' Prophecy was not Cobden's business, but his optimism led him to make three prophecies concerning the effects of Free Trade, and in two out of the three time has proved him entirely wrong. The subsequent history of Europe has not fulfilled the hope that Free Trade will spread or will be a force making for peace. Tariffs grow higher not lower, and the United States, the new dominating factor in world affairs, leads the way with a high ' tariff wall ' ; no principles ever apply to all States at all times in all conditions ; geography, history, and character combined to make Free Trade profitable for England in the middle of the nineteenth century, but, far from this proving that it would be in the best interest of all other nations, it is to-day seriously under discussion whether even for England the special conditions which justified Free Trade have not disappeared. Other nations had not our particular set of circumstances ; we became industrialized a generation earlier than any other country ; France was put back by her revolution, Germany and Italy were absorbed in achieving political unity until the middle of the century ; we were therefore in an unrivalled position for concentrating our energies on securing the trade of the world. We could not both supply the wants of the world and grow our own food, and as other nations could grow food

as well as we could but could not manufacture with the same efficiency, we followed the principle of ' the division of labour ' and devoted ourselves to the occupation in which we excelled and trusted to foreign corn, as that was the medium with which other nations would be bound to pay for our manufactures.

Cobden's expectation was reasonable for those who looked first to economic motives, but it is only natives of favoured States who can consider these. England had peace and a national unity centuries old ; she also had colonies. Other countries had not these advantages. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new aggressive feeling of nationality which has gone far to nullify the forces making for European peace. Italy and Germany only attained national unity and independence after a fierce struggle to which all else had to be subordinated ; smaller nationalities in the Balkans, hitherto submerged, rose demanding their recognition, and the intense national spirit engendered in political affairs expressed itself economically in keeping out of the country goods which might lessen the production of those made at home. Nationalism tends to encourage monopoly, and since Cobden's death nationalism has dominated Europe.

The history of Europe since Cobden's death in 1865 proves him equally wrong in foreseeing an era of peace. As Free Trade has not fulfilled his hope by becoming universal, it is perhaps not fair to count his second prophecy wrong ; but it may be doubted, from recent experience, whether Free Trade would lead to good relations between nations in practice. There are ' tariff wars ', which may lead to armed settlements ; economic interests of different nations do not necessarily harmonize any more than political interests ; the desire and need for new markets may prove as urgent a cause of war as any other.

Cobden had been more fortunate in his earlier prophecy, that Free Trade in corn would not ruin the farmers or lower the rents of the landlords ; agriculture flourished

more after 1846 than before. But here his correctness had a time limit; until 1870, as he foretold, improved trade so increased the demand for food that home-grown wheat found a good market at a good price; but Cobden did not foresee the later effects of the revolution in transport which had barely begun when the Corn Laws were repealed. While transport was still by road or sailing ship, foreign supplies of corn could never be enormous, and were bound to be dearer because of the difficulty of carriage. Russia, too, was hampered in corn production by the Crimean War in the 'fifties, America by her Civil War in the 'sixties, so that it was not till both of them were at peace and steamships and trains had begun to narrow the limits of the world that the final effects of allowing free import were seen. But after 1870 English agriculture entered on a period of depression from which there has not yet been a recovery.

In attempting to convert England and the world to his ideas Cobden worked on his own, without the co-operation of Bright. Bright shared his desire for peace, but the two friends were each busy with independent lines of action after 1847. The times offered unlimited scope for the preaching of the doctrine of peace; in England the dominant figure was Palmerston, jovial, hectoring, delighting in the sport of poking up sleeping lions abroad and seeking the honour of his country by asserting her authority in and out of season, detested in Europe as much as he was admired in England. The nation, inspired by Palmerston, had a warlike fit on in the middle years of the century. Across the Channel, Napoleon III, by his mere name, provided food for an 'invasion scare' whenever anyone cared to stir opinion; and while Palmerston stood out against this particular fear for some time, he finally joined in the popular feeling, and even while he resisted the popular tendency to find a national bogey in France, he provided an alternative one in Russia, the menace to our power in the East.

Cobden steadily opposed every manifestation of warlike spirit, and in consequence found himself cast out from the

favour of League days; from being the voice of the nation he became the voice crying in the wilderness. He opposed Palmerston's proposal for new barracks, for new fortifications on the south coast, for more armaments, for volunteers. He argued skilfully every point in the case made by Palmerston for England's entry into the Crimean War, then, powerless to stop her entering, he drew up plans for bringing the war to a close without fighting it out to the end. He condemned, and led the House to condemn, an act of bullying committed in China by a British officer and condoned by Palmerston; he exerted all his influence on both sides to keep relations between the United States and England friendly while the War of the North and South was fought. He joined peace societies, attended international conferences on methods of avoiding war, and preached the value of arbitration and reduction of armaments in bringing about that state of international concord in which alone all nations could find prosperity and happiness. He preached in vain; the country preferred the assertion made by Palmerston, that the meanest subject of any part of the British dominions must be able to feel that complete security and superiority that a subject of Rome felt when he uttered the magic words '*Civis Romanus Sum*'. Parliament and nation poured wrath and scorn on 'the inspired bagman with his calico millennium', and many echoed Tennyson's view:

> Though niggard throats of Manchester may brawl
> What England was, shall her true sons forget?
> We are not cotton spinners all,
> But some love England and her honour yet.

Cobden loved England's honour, but he sought it in new and unpopular ways; the ways were prosaic and so were his arguments. War, he saw, meant waste of wealth and life; waste meant poverty for some part of the nation, and therefore discontent and trouble. Since the main reason for the existence of government must be the

welfare of a nation, it could not be in the true interest of government to allow wars which destroy that welfare. So he dissected the actual meaning of 'the blood-red blossom of war' which Tennyson idealized as a remedy for the existing materialism.

Popular disapproval of his ideas found practical expression at the general election of 1857, when he and other League leaders were rejected by their constituencies. Greville, noting in his Diary 'the complete rout of the old Leaguers', adds, 'They, who were once the idol of millions and not without cause, have not only lost all their popularity but are objects of execration and can nowhere find a Parliamentary resting place.'

Unpopularity in political life is likely to be as fleeting as popularity, and four years after this defeat Cobden was back in the House of Commons, had had the honour of refusing a minor post in the Cabinet of his old foe Palmerston, and was once more acknowledged as a man of public importance playing an influential part in national affairs.

'Cotton-spinners all' might be supposed indifferent to 'the honour' of England, but at least one cotton-spinner had, in these years, performed a service generally admitted to be beneficial to his country, though he acted, in his own words, 'in the capacity of a poacher'. In 1859, seeing the evil to both countries of the panic feeling about the intentions of Napoleon III, he had suggested that a Commercial Treaty with our nearest neighbour would avoid such dangerous alarms, by linking the interests of the two countries together. He consulted Gladstone, entered on unofficial soundings of French opinion, and brought the project through its delicate preliminaries to the status of an official proposal. Finally, he was given full authority to negotiate a Commercial Treaty with the French Emperor and to sign it as Joint Plenipotentiary, altogether acting as a kind of unofficial ambassador on behalf of the Government. This 'amateur' diplomacy aroused great interest and restored him to a full measure of his old popularity. He was officially received on his return to England, feasted by the Lord

Mayor, welcomed by the House of Commons, and offered a baronetcy or a place in the Privy Council. He refused reward, saying that ' the only reward I desire is to live to witness an improvement in the relations of the two great neighbouring nations '. This attitude was in keeping with his refusal of Palmerston's offer and his general feeling that his particular contribution to the country's welfare was best made from a detached position : ' I preferred pioneering for my convictions to promotion at their expense,' he once explained.

No new activity marked the years remaining to him after the Commercial Treaty of 1861. The ideal of international friendliness continued to inspire his work, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the American War pass without a breach in English neutrality, and the nation refuse to encourage Palmerston's desire to interfere between Prussia and the ' Danish Duchies ' in 1864. But his health was an increasing trouble to him ; he found public appearances fatiguing, and finally a visit to his electors at Rochdale brought on the illness from which he died in 1865.

At the time of his defeat in the election of 1857 Cobden received a letter from Bright, in which Bright referred to ' the sudden break-up of the " school " of which we have been the chief professors '. This ' school ' was more than a chance phrase on the part of Bright ; Cobden and Bright were the leaders of a real school of political thought, the ' Manchester School ' (translated even into German as *Manchesterthum*)—a school with well-defined doctrines and recognized as exercising a distinct influence on the course of English political thought and policy. The teaching imparted by its ' chief professors ' was based in the first place on economics ; free circulation of all goods between all countries was the first article in the Manchester creed. Along with this went the general belief in *laissez-faire*, applied, like Free Trade, abroad as well as at home. Abroad, this implied no interference in the affairs of other nations, peace and goodwill in foreign relations, avoidance of colonial entanglements ; at home it meant

a minimum of government interference with the liberty of the individual.

This mistrust of government was partly due to the low opinion held by the Manchester school of its capacity: 'The more I see of rulers,' Cobden remarked, 'the less of wisdom and greatness do I find necessary for the government of mankind'; and on another occasion he declared that governments 'are always standing conspiracies to rob and bamboozle'. The less legislation, therefore, the better in Manchester eyes. Cobden was deeply concerned with the 'Condition of England', but he could not look to government interference with industrial problems for its remedy; factory regulation, education, housing—all could only be dealt with effectively by the efforts of private individuals; children, he admitted, might need State protection, but not adults, and he constantly poured scorn on Shaftesbury, 'canting as always about somebody's sufferings'. Cobden, like Place, believed in 'self-help'; he truly claimed that wherever he went 'it was always with an eye to the state of the great majority who everywhere constitute the toiling base of the social pyramid'; but he firmly believed that the true kindness was to assure them abundant and so cheaper food, and leave them to find all other benefits flowing from this one.

The 'Manchester School' stood at the opposite pole from the Imperialist point of view. If governments had not even wisdom enough to rule England wisely they had better at least limit their sphere to their own land: 'If,' Cobden asks, 'Parliament has proved incapable of giving London effective sewers, why entrust it with the task of irrigating India?' To neither side, ruler nor ruled, did he consider the extension of British authority would bring blessing; they would be best left to their own devices, we, with a Free Trade world, no longer wanted the monopoly of their markets. During the Indian Mutiny he frankly cried: 'Happy the day when England no longer owns an acre of territory in Continental Asia.' For such colonies as England already owned, pending their separation, he strongly approved the grant of self-government. It is

significant that this indifference to colonial possessions was fairly general in England during the mid-years of the nineteenth century, and the influence of the Manchester School was strongly felt on this point. In this and in the doctrine of 'Non-Intervention' abroad Manchester achieved some of its influence through Gladstone, who has been called Cobden's chief pupil. Palmerston died in the same year as Cobden, and Gladstone came to the front of the Liberal party, so that after Cobden's death his teaching, supplemented by Bright, swayed opinion more than during his own life, when Palmerston held the public ear.

The two 'chief professors' of the Manchester School stressed different points; Bright added democracy to his programme, but Cobden, thinking government so useless, felt no particular interest in its form, and he kept aloof from Bright's campaign for the admission of the working classes to voting rights. It was not worth while tinkering with 'that great juggle the English Constitution . . . a thing of monopolies and Churchcraft and sinecures, armorial hocus-pocus, primogeniture and pageantry'. He thought it was more urgent to spread right views among those who already had votes than to add to the number of ignorant voters, and frankly stated that he thought the middle classes were the best people to exercise political power: 'You never heard me canting about the superior claims of the working class.' In this he was no Radical; political questions, in fact, appealed to him only as they affected economic questions.

The character of the man was typified by his oratory. He accomplished much of the Corn Law work by speeches, but 'he spoke to persuade', as one hearer described it. He played with facts rather than eloquence, he spoke pithily rather than at length, he excelled in making his hearers understand, and he converted them by the earnestness of his own conviction and his appeal to their reason rather than by swaying feelings. This practical, shrewd method of speaking was in keeping with all his work. Like Place, again, he was good at getting things

done ; one critic of his own day expressed this characteristic when he wrote : ' Mr. Cobden was not the first to find out that the Corn Laws were bad laws . . . but he was the most effectual of those who discovered how the Corn Laws were to be repealed.' Faith without works, in his eyes, was dead ; he summed up his creed when he reminded earnest-speaking philanthropists that ' their humanity must not be confined to the negro at the Antipodes nor to the extension of Church establishments '.

Members of Parliament and of the old land-owning aristocracy were not without justification in mistrusting Cobden and Bright as portents of a new and suspected age. Time was on their side ; they fitted into the new age and had a clearer perception of its problems, needs, and direction than had those who refused to meet them in society ; Cobden might have to face contempt because he did not belong to a family that had held a proud position in the past, but he won his high position because he had a part in the future.

BOOKS ON COBDEN

MORLEY : *Life.* (Standard work, very full.)
MACCUNN : Article in *Six Radical Thinkers.*
FAY : Chapter XI in *Life and Labour.*
BAGEHOT : Article in collected biographies, written on Cobden's death.
KNOWLES : *The Industrial and Commercial Revolutions in Great Britain during the Nineteenth Century* (for Free Trade).

CHAPTER VII

JOHN BRIGHT

1811–1889

BRIGHT'S name follows naturally on that of Cobden. English history can show other pairs of names in politics which thus inevitably call up each other, but they are pairs of opponents, Pitt and Fox, Disraeli and Gladstone, joined together in conflicts, not in friendship. Cobden and Bright were linked equally closely in common public causes and in personal friendship. They first met in early manhood; in 1843 they became joint workers in the Free Trade cause, and for seven years laboured side by side; together they enjoyed the fruits of the Free Trade victory after 1846, and together they endured the unpopularity which resulted from their opposition to the Crimean War. Where their interests coincided their friendship strengthened their work for a common cause; where their interests diverged there was no lessening of private friendship. Bright saved Cobden when he was struggling in deep financial waters; Cobden supported and encouraged Bright in wearisome illness. When Cobden died, twenty-four years before Bright, Bright said he felt as if he had left half his life in the grave of his friend. Their intimacy stands out all the more clearly because both were, in other ways, somewhat isolated by character and circumstances.

John Bright's family was one of the many which migrated from agriculture in the South to industry in the North during the Industrial Revolution. Bright was one of the eleven children of a cotton-spinner and grew up in a plain Quaker home beside his father's mill outside Rochdale. He left school when he was only fifteen and returned home to learn the family business by 'working

his way up'. A permanent impress was made on his character by the close contact in which he and his father worked with those employed in the mill; it gave that marked democratic bent and belief in the fundamental equality of all men which was to distinguish him later. This attitude was further strengthened by the Quaker atmosphere which surrounded him both at home and at a succession of Quaker schools, and which implanted in him that high seriousness and moral purpose which impressed even his critics and contributed much to his influence in public life. To this early environment he also owed that soaking in the moving phrases of the Old Testament and of the Puritan writers which later gave character to his speeches, setting them in a class apart.

In early manhood he began to interest himself in public affairs. He travelled and pursued his education, founded and read papers to a literary and philosophical society, waged war with the vicar against the compulsory payment of Church Rates by Dissenters and organized a local branch of the first Anti-Corn Law Association.

It was Cobden who first brought Bright out into public life. In 1845 Bright's young wife died and Cobden sought to turn his great grief into fresh channels, by reminding him of the sufferings of others: 'There are thousands of houses in England,' he reminded his friend, 'at this moment, where wives, mothers, and children are dying of hunger. Now, when the first paroxysms of your grief are past, I would advise you to come with me and we will never rest till the Corn Law is repealed.' Bright's own loss made him quick to respond to this appeal, and for the next few years the two friends lived in the closest contact, working for the removal of the 'taxes on food'.

In this work Bright always looked on himself as second to Cobden. When Cobden suggested that he might be forced to retire from public life in order to deal with the growing disorganization of his private affairs, Bright wrote anxiously: 'As a second I can fight, but there are incapacities about me . . . which prevent my being more than a second.' Bright always took a modest view of his

powers, but here, though his particular gifts contributed an essential part to the success of the Free Trade movement, he was right in seeing that without Cobden he might never have played his part at all and that his position was supplementary to Cobden's. His peculiar contribution was his oratory. Cobden could make good speeches, and he usually spoke first, explaining the position and arguing convincingly ; but on the foundation thus laid Bright would raise a wonderful structure of passionate oratory, carrying his hearers away with him. Both in the House of Commons and in the country audiences owned his spell-binding sway. Meetings listened entranced to Free Trade arguments ; he seized their imaginations on the most unpromising matter ; one lady declared she would never go to hear Mr. Bright speak again as she could not stand the excitement to which he moved her. This was work which no one else in the movement was capable of doing, and here Bright stood ahead of Cobden. In all the rest of the work of the League he shared Cobden's labours, and between 1843 and 1846 the career of one man almost stood for both.

On Bright's first entry into the House of Commons his fellow members found something a little ludicrous in this new type of Parliamentarian ; his clothes were not like other men's, his Quaker speech and ways were not those to which they were accustomed, but they soon found that there was nothing there to laugh at. Bright had entered Parliament with a purpose, and the House must be made aware of it, whether it liked it or not. He was wiser than many new men ; he did not despise the House for its defects, but set himself to learn its ways and to use its machinery so as to obtain the most effectual results. He soon showed, despite the unfriendly atmosphere, that he could beat honourable members on their own ground. He showed skill in the delicate matter of managing a Committee, when he succeeded in securing one to inquire into the working of the Game Laws. He knew how to make straightforward statements of facts when they were required. He could tell the House that in one year

England lost 128,000 workmen through emigration, and that in the same year she had 1,419,000 paupers to keep out of public money. He stated that he had had experiments made which enabled him to assure those who defended the Game Laws that four and a half rabbits consumed as much food as a sheep in the same time. Never, he truly assured Members, did he make a speech on a subject of which he had not first ' laid the foundation of information '. But Bright could do more than this : he could play, in speeches, on every stop which moves men's hearts ; humour, sentiment, moral indignation in turn helped to force a reluctant House to attend to his views. The Free Trade question did not provide the scope for oratory that later issues were to offer, but it gave the House some idea of the power of the weapon that this Quaker Member had in his keeping.

This phase of Bright's career came to an end when he seconded the motion which Cobden proposed in 1847 : ' That a Corn Law having been passed, the active existence of the League is suspended.' The two men shared most of the group of ideas belonging to the Manchester School, but once the primary principle of Free Trade was secured, each tended to stress different articles of the creed, and close co-operation became occasional rather than continuous. Both worked for a ' Free Press ', for education, for national economy, for peace and, generally, for all those things contributing to the dominance of the *laissez-faire* ideal, but, while Cobden pursued his Free Trade belief into foreign affairs, Bright found the main interest throughout the rest of his life in winning votes for working men, and the two friends followed independent courses.

This divergence had been foreshadowed in a slight difference of attitude even toward Free Trade ; to Bright it had presented itself more as a working-class matter than it did to Cobden. Bright took an interest in political questions for the sake of their bearing on the well-being of the masses, Cobden was only interested in politics for economic reasons. While Cobden next pursued Free Trade ideals beyond England, Bright saw his duty in the

enfranchising of the masses. One sort of aristocratic monopoly had now been broken down, and the next step was to attack the political monopoly of the landowners in the same peaceful, systematic way. Bright grew more Radical, Cobden less. Cobden gave no encouragement to Bright's plan for extending power downwards; he was satisfied with the fruits of 1832, and it is worth noting that he died just before the death of Palmerston set free new forces, while Bright lived on into the new age, taking part in two further extensions of the vote.

One more incident brought them once again into close partnership as in the League days, when together they stood out against Parliament and public opinion in condemning England's entry into the Crimean War. Bright was no longer second to Cobden; his were the speeches which compelled Parliament to listen to unsparing condemnation of the policy which most of them favoured and in which they had the whole-hearted support of the nation, aflame with warlike ardour. Nothing could be done beyond attempting to sway opinion; speech-making was the sole weapon that could be used in this campaign, and quite quickly it was forced upon Bright that it was futile to try to get even a hearing in the country. The House of Commons at least gave him the hearing necessary for him to bring his weapon into play. In a series of speeches which won an attentive hearing from a hostile audience, which caused Disraeli to say he would give all he had to have had the honour of making one of them, which still live to-day through their frequently-quoted phrases (an unusual fate for Parliamentary speeches), Bright opposed both our entry into the Crimean War and its conduct. He tore to shreds a policy which took England into a war on the side of a Mohammedan power against a Christian, on an issue that in no way concerned her; to the 'levity' of Palmerston, 'the aged charlatan', he opposed a sobering picture of what war meant to the men left lying on the battle-field and to the ordinary home from which those men had been torn: 'What do war taxes mean? An absence of medical attendance for a

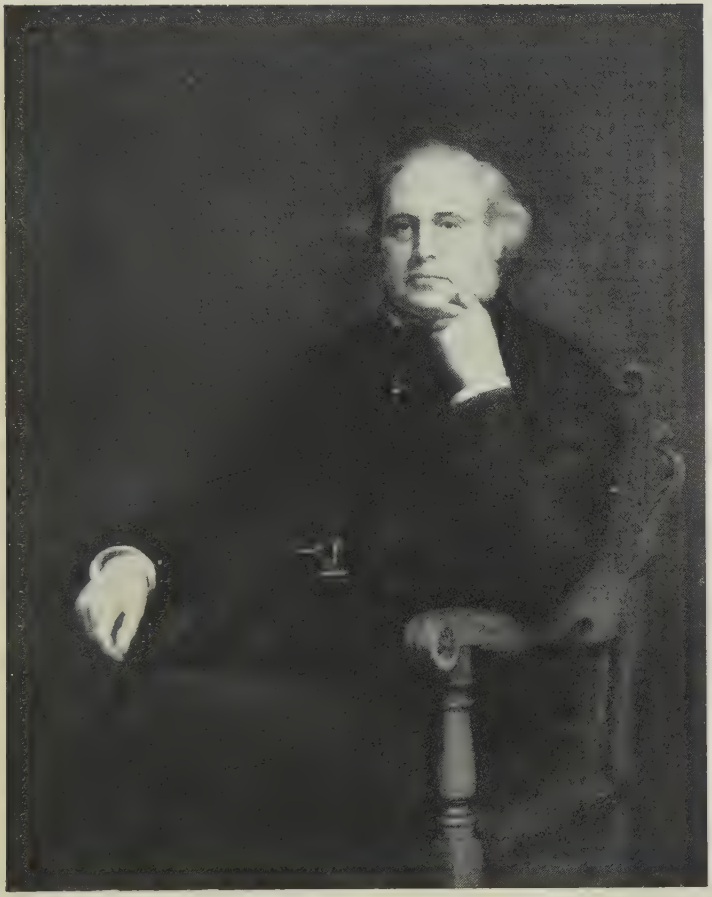
sick wife, the absence of the school-pence for three or four little children, hopeless toil to the father of a family, penury through his life, a cheerless age and, at last,

> the little bell
> Toll'd hastily for a pauper's funeral.'

War, some said lightly, was nothing; but he seemed to observe on many faces a look of anxiety that was new to them: 'The angel of death has been abroad in the land, you may almost hear the beating of his wings.' Some had in memory one of their number, recently among them, 'the stormy Euxine is his grave . . . the five little children fatherless, his wife a widow'. Professor Trevelyan quotes a tribute from one present to the intense effect of these words, which produced 'the most deferential attention, deepening every instant until it reached a climax probably unparalleled in the recollection of any individual present'. As the essential Cobbett is best seen in *Rural Rides*, so the essential Bright is perhaps best found in his Crimean speeches. Even his own modesty was driven to allow him to reflect in his Diary on the compliments with which he was 'overloaded', and he guards himself against 'the food for vanity that lurks in this effect wrought by one reared in retirement, of a ridiculed sect, without the prolonged education enjoyed by most of his listeners'.

Bright and Cobden were used to fighting in a small minority inside Parliament, but now they were isolated outside Parliament as well as inside. Bright was actually burned in effigy in his own Manchester, and the country's opinion of his recent efforts was clearly expressed by his defeat at the general election that came in 1857, on, ironically enough, Cobden's motion condemning the Chinese policy of Palmerston.

The year of this defeat at Manchester was a dividing year in Bright's life. The important connexion with Manchester was severed and replaced by a new one with Birmingham, which was to endure till his death; he and



JOHN BRIGHT

From the painting by W. W. Ouless in the National Portrait Gallery

Cobden worked henceforth on more independent lines, and he took up the matter which was to be his chief interest during the remaining thirty years of his life—Parliamentary Reform. The break appears more complete, also, because it coincided with a serious illness which kept him out of all public activity for two years. Dr. Johnson, when Boswell spoke of men being vexed by the course of public affairs, replied that that was cant, for ' public affairs vex no man ', and when pressed as to his own feelings declared that ' I have never slept one hour less nor eat an ounce less meat.' Bright was an exception to this attitude, and the worry about the Crimean ' mistake ' brought on what to-day would be called a ' nervous breakdown '.

The next ten years saw Bright win recognition as one of the most important men in politics. It was his work for extending the right to vote that brought him to this position, making him the representative of the new ' Radical ' force which roused the Liberal party after its long quiescence under the leadership of Palmerston.

Bright's desire to give votes to working men had the same root as his desire for Free Trade ; he saw in it a means of helping the masses. His first experience in the House of Commons had led him to complain that from the speeches no one would have suspected the existence of ' the Condition of England Question ', and it was to ensure attention to this question that he wished to place the workers on the lists of voters, when Members would be obliged to pay attention to their needs. ' The question is,' as he inquired pertinently in another connexion, ' can the cats justly and judiciously legislate for the mice ? ' The answer to his question was clearly in the negative. The Reform Bill of 1832, fought for with so much zeal by the working class, brought them little immediate satisfaction. It trebled the number of electors and widened the franchise, but it fixed the qualification too high to be within the reach of working men. In towns the old unsystematic qualifications for a vote were abolished, and numbers of working men lost votes which

they had exercised as ' freemen ' or ' scot and lot ' payers. The new uniform qualification which created the ' ten-pound householder ' admitted practically no working man to a vote, but put power into the hands of the larger part of the middle classes. Similarly, in counties, the increased electorate were members of the middle class, men with some substantial ' stake in the country ', since they must either own land or, if tenants, must rent land worth fifty pounds a year. The ultimate direction of this Act was democratic, but there was nothing democratic in its terms.

Profound disappointment overtook the workers when the precise effects of the Act came home to them, and it was certain that they would, at some time, renew the attack on class monopoly. The old monopoly of the landlords had, it is true, been broken, but as, from the point of view of the workers, political power was now the monopoly of the middle class, the precedent set in allowing the ancient Constitution to be changed was bound to be followed. Here lay the importance of 1832 ; once a rational and uniform definition of what qualified a man to vote had been laid down there was no reason why that definition should not be modified.

At the moment, however, the workers were filled with a distaste for politics and turned to social schemes, to Owen and his plans, and to Trade Unionism. Political reform allured them again when the realization of their own helplessness was driven home by their failure to obtain repeal of the hated New Poor Law, or adequate Factory legislation. Agitations for these objects were begun, but all finally developed into the London Working Men's Association, founded by Lovett to work for further extension of the franchise. Lovett, helped by Place, embodied his democratic programme in the ' People's Charter ', with its Six Points framed to secure political power for the masses, and with Universal Suffrage as its main object. And for the next ten years the movement for Parliamentary Reform was in the hands of the Chartists. Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League were

always on bad terms. Chartists refused to have dealings with the middle class and suspected the League as a middle-class device for weakening the force of their agitation. Each thought the other was beginning at the wrong end, Chartists believing that without Reform of Parliament repeal of the Corn Laws would never be obtained, Leaguers holding that it was hopeless to urge Parliament to give votes to the workers until their economic status was raised and their position more prosperous and respectable, a result only to be achieved by repeal of the Corn Laws. Bright's democratic views made him sympathize with the Chartists, but he knew that the firebrands amongst them, followers of O'Connor rather than of the constitutionally minded Lovett, would only increase the unwillingness of the governing classes to extend the franchise. He could gauge the effect on the respectable classes of speeches such as those made by Stephens: 'We have sworn by God, by heaven, earth, and hell that we shall wrap in one awful sheet of devouring flame the manufactories of the cotton tyrants.'

As the League prospered, the Chartist Movement sank more and more into unprosperous ways, and in 1848 came to a complete and inglorious end, which was followed by a long lull in working-class interest in Parliamentary Reform. For twenty years the working class devoted their energies to building up sound, healthy industrial organizations—Trade Unions on a humble but more lasting scale than Owen's Grand National, Friendly Societies, Co-operative Societies. The prick of economic distress grew less sharp after 1848; first through a fall in prices, then through a rise in wages, the 'standard of living' rose a little; the country went through a period of prosperity between 1848–1870, and, reconciled somewhat by the slight improvement in their own lot, the workers accepted the new conditions and set themselves to make the best of them. Free Trade may justly claim some credit for the lessening distress, while the decrease in agitation sprang in part from reforms like the Factory Acts, which convinced the workers that the government

had some concern for the welfare of the masses. Demand for Parliamentary Reform had arisen in time of great economic distress, and now it died down as distress lessened.

But the subject of Parliamentary Reform was never allowed quite to sink into oblivion; from time to time some enthusiast, generally Russell or Bright, gave it an airing. The vicissitudes through which the cause of Reform passed in these quiet years was once amusingly summarized by Gladstone in the House: 'In 1851 my noble friend, then Prime Minister, commenced with a promise of what was to be done in twelve months; in 1852 he brought in a Bill and it disappeared, together with the Ministry. In 1853 we had the Ministry of Lord Aberdeen, which commenced with a promise of reform in twelve months. Well, 1854 arrived, and with it the Bill, but also the war, and the war was found a good reason for abandoning the Bill. Then came the government of my noble friend the member for Tiverton, who was not less unfortunate in the circumstances which prevented the redemption of those pledges which had been given from the mouth of the sovereign. In 1855 my noble friend escaped all responsibility for Reform on account of the war; in 1856 on account of the peace; in 1857 by the dissolution of Parliament; in 1858 by the dissolution of his government.'

This disheartening series of disappointments appeared to Bright to be drawing to its close in 1859. His expectations were premature and though in one sense the Reform question entered in 1859 upon a fresh stage, it proved not to be the final one, and in 1866 Gladstone was still able to lament that: 'The limbo of abortive creations is peopled with the skeletons of Reform Bills.'

Bright put Parliamentary Reform in the forefront of his work when he became Member for Birmingham, and he strove to inspire his new constituency with his own zeal by reminding them that it was an earlier generation of Birmingham men that, led by Attwood, had given a lead to the country during the agitation of 1830–1832.

A mild interest in the subject outside Parliament led Disraeli to think Reform might be a popular measure, and he introduced a Bill during the brief Tory Ministry of 1859. Bright's own activity was in part responsible for this, but its ' lateral extension ' and ' fancy franchises ' seemed to him worse than no reform ; it was no step in the direction of democracy to give more votes to those already enfranchised, by awarding them as a sort of prize to men whose soundness was guaranteed by their having taken Orders or a degree or laid up money. These ' fancy franchises ' must be defeated lest such a sham extension of the franchise be treated as a reason for blocking real Reform.

But there was another disappointment still in store for Bright, this time at the hands of his own party. Lord Russell, hitherto one of the most devoted advocates of Reform, approached Bright on behalf of Palmerston, promising a measure of Reform in return for Bright's support of the new ministry. Bright agreed to the proposal, but after a half-hearted attempt at a measure Lord Russell drew down upon himself Bright's unbounded scorn by deciding that as ' Palmerston hates Reform as he hates the devil ', Reform was out of the question so long as Palmerston lived. Once more, therefore, Bright had to resign himself to another period of waiting, drawing such consolation as he could from the famous declaration with which Gladstone ' unwittingly set the Thames on fire ' in 1864 ; ' I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the constitution.' There hardly seems cause here for much excitement, but Palmerston protested in pained surprise that this was more the sort of stuff he expected to hear from John Bright, while Gladstone ruefully admitted that ' it needs to be construed '. The following year saw the end of the *ancien régime* ; Palmerston, ' the Conservative leader of the Liberal party ', died, and Gladstone, leaving Oxford and its restrictions behind went ' unmuzzled ' to represent

Lancashire, while Russell replaced Palmerston as Prime Minister.

In 1859 *Punch* had published a cartoon representing Disraeli, Russell, and Bright trying to stir up the sleepy British lion to take an interest in Reform of Parliament. The lion at that date had slept on undisturbed, but, with the omens now auspicious, Bright was determined that no absence of public demand should be urged as an excuse for any further delay. He had no need to press the government to take up the subject; neither Russell nor Gladstone, in view of their past, could hesitate to make it their first measure. Had they wavered in their own allegiance to the cause of Reform an estimate of the extent of Bright's influence with the nation made by a newspaper of the day suggests that they would have found it difficult to avoid responsibility for some Reform measure: 'Mr. Bright,' stated the newspaper, 'now governs although he does not reign.'

Gladstone's Bill was so very small an affair that if it had passed it would hardly have forwarded the cause of democracy at all. It merely lowered the amount of the property qualifications laid down in 1832, still excluding the bulk of the working class from the franchise. Professor Trevelyan aptly describes this proposal as nothing more than 'the vaccination of the State with democracy to avert the real disease'. Fortunately for the cause that Bright had at heart even this mild dose was more than the Tories and a section of the Whig-Liberals were willing to allow, so that Bright soon found himself ardently defending a measure which in its terms was a great blow to his expectations.

A remarkable Reform crisis filled the years 1866–1867, ending in a remarkable result. A Liberal Bill, providing for a very small extension of the franchise, was defeated by the union of Liberals and Conservatives; the Conservatives replaced the defeated Ministry and in their turn introduced a mild Reform measure. They were, however, in a minority in the House of Commons and so were unable to resist pressure from the Liberals. The result was that

before it finally passed their Reform Bill had been transformed into a democratic measure, bestowing the vote on all householders in towns. In this unexpected and circuitous way Bright at last saw put into practice the plan for ' Household Suffrage ', which he had not dared to propose in 1859, fearing lest so democratic a suggestion should alienate possible allies. This result had been achieved mainly through Bright's own efforts.

The detailed history of the passing of this Bill, which was described by the leader of the party responsible for it as ' a leap in the dark ', is a curious one. Bright had been unable to secure the success of the Bill of his own party, and when Gladstone first introduced the measure popular opinion had shown itself perfectly indifferent on the point. As, however, the debates proceeded, and as opposition reared its head, this indifference began to dissolve. Robert Lowe, one of Gladstone's own party, was the fiercest opponent of his leader's measure, and he put into Bright's hands a weapon that proved most useful in provoking the apathetic working classes, and especially the Trade Unions. Lowe, in opposing the extension of the franchise, inquired rhetorically: ' If you want venality, if you want ignorance, if you want drunkenness, where do you look for them in the constituencies ? Do you go to the top or to the bottom ? ' and his question was greeted by the House with a howl of approval. Bright, armed with this provocative insult, which he caused to be printed and widely distributed, set about stirring the ' bottom of the constituencies ', and even those who were so low that they were not included in the constituencies at all. He stimulated them to make their voices heard outside, while inside the House of Commons he himself made a series of memorable speeches against the ' Botany Bay ' view taken ' by certain members ' of the mass of their fellow countrymen. (Lowe had spent some years in Australia.) But all his wit failed to secure the passing of the Bill. Lowe and others of the government's party voted against their own side, in union with the Conservatives, and Russell resigned.

The Conservatives had defeated the Liberal attempt at Reform, but Gladstone and Bright were determined that they should in their turn grapple with the problem that they had prevented the Liberals from solving. Bright had a fair acquaintance with the workings of the mind of Disraeli, who, though serving under the leadership of Lord Derby in the new ministry, was the real power in the Conservative party. Disraeli, he knew, had 'his ear to the ground', and Bright took steps to make sure that he should hear an unmistakable murmur in favour of extension of the franchise. Large meetings of reformers took place in the northern towns; Trade Unions were encouraged to form processions and show both their strength and their desires; a Reform League held a monster demonstration meeting in London, and when Parliament resumed its session, the working classes had made it sufficiently clear that they would not submit to having the offered morsel snatched from their lips now that their appetite had been aroused, however little eagerness they had shown when Gladstone had first offered it. 'Moderate but irresistible in our moderation' was Bright's watchword, and it proved effective. He knew how to unite middle class and working class in a cause which affected both, since 1832 left part of the middle class out of the Constitution, a fortunate omission for those anxious to push Reform further.

The Conservatives at once set to work on a Bill and Bright had further need for ingenuity. The previous session had been spent in striving to keep alive the measure of his own party, for which he had little enthusiasm, except that it was better than nothing; this session was spent in successfully cutting out of the other party's Bill all the clauses which limited its effect and in turning a Conservative Bill into a democratic one such as the Liberals could not have passed. The Conservative Prime Minister prided himself on having 'dished the Whigs' by his Reform Bill; but when he went on to claim it as a 'Tory triumph', one of his own party pertinently pointed out that, 'If it be a Conservative triumph

to have adopted the principles of your most determined adversary, the honourable member for Birmingham . . . then in the whole course of your annals, I will venture to say the Conservative party has won no triumph so signal as this.'

Bright lived just long enough to share in the Reform measure of 1884–1885, by which Gladstone rounded off the Act of 1867, extending the household suffrage to all constituencies, in counties as well as in towns. His activity in this matter was limited to speaking at a mass meeting in Exeter Hall and presenting a petition from the agricultural labourers, but the Act was merely the inevitable extension of the principle that he had done so much to win in 1866–1867. Roughly speaking, England enjoyed universal male suffrage after these Bills; the upper classes still used the word 'democracy' in a sinister sense, but, if the name might not be used, the thing was secure, and Bright's deep democratic conviction was satisfied, in the political sphere.

This democratic sentiment was of the very essence of the man. It developed early, the natural equalitarian bent of his mind receiving a further impulse from the conditions of his introduction to life, in home and school. It came out in many ways, both in great issues and in details. It lay at the root of his sympathy with the Northern States in the American Civil War, when he and Cobden strove hard to create a sympathy with the democratic North strong enough to counterbalance the tendency of the upper classes to favour the slave-owning but more congenial South. Bright was a friend of Sumner, a member of Lincoln's Cabinet, and the letters that passed between the two men were not without influence on the development of opinion on both sides. While Gladstone and the governing classes generally were expressing sympathy with the South in its desire to withdraw from the Union, Bright saw that the real issue at stake was slavery, an issue intimately connected with the fate of democracy throughout the world. He saw there was danger that England would be provoked to interfere on

the side of the South, and he used all his influence with Sumner to urge Lincoln and his Ministers to avoid every action that might be provocative of such interference. When Lincoln at last, in 1862, issued his Proclamation abolishing slavery, English opinion swung round to Bright's position, and the 'Secession Question' was seen to be subordinate to this deeper one of slavery. The final defeat of the slave-owning side drew from Bright eloquent thanksgiving: 'The ground reeled under the nation during the four years' agony until at last, after the smoke of the battle-field had cleared away, the horrid shape which had cast its shadow over a whole continent had vanished and was gone for ever.'

His conviction of the fundamental equality of all men sometimes produced humorous results when brought to bear on the details of life. When he paid the visit customary for a new Minister to his sovereign, his democratic plainness was outraged at the moment of arrival. The servant who met him at the door took from him his carpet bag and handed it to some underling; Bright turned indignantly to his companion, protesting, 'I would have carried it myself if I had known the fellow was too fine to take it.' Entry into the Cabinet brought other perplexities. The regulation dress in which a Minister was presented to the Queen appeared to him as 'livery' which he could not bring himself to put on, nor did his principles allow him to bend his knee as he kissed the Queen's hand. Mr. Gladstone had to be called in to negotiate a compromise between Bright's scruples and Royal dignity.

Bright's part in the Reform crisis of 1866–1867 brought him to the opening of a new stage in his political career. His influence had long been great, his exertions had put him in the forefront of national affairs, but now official recognition was given to his influence by his admission to the Cabinet. It is difficult to appreciate the significance of this. For years Bright had been one of the most hated men in public life; he stood, in the minds of the great mass of the upper classes, for some new and dangerous

element that was making its appearance in English politics. It was impossible to doubt his ability and power, but it was equally impossible to doubt that this power contained a threat to the continued dominance of the old governing classes. He was a democrat, and democracy meant to many people at that time what Bolshevism means to many to-day ; and while his views made him feared and hated, he was despised on social grounds. Gladstone was therefore taking a bold step, it was thought, when he admitted him into the inner circle of political power, for it was not long since it had been customary in certain circles to assert willingness to ' walk twenty miles to see John Bright hanged '.

His support was necessary to the Ministry which took up power in 1868. Gladstone entered office to give practical effect to the swelling tide of Liberalism, which, held up by the Conservative attitude of Palmerston, was full of force. A new course of reforms was due to follow the extension of the vote in 1867, just as in 1832, and while Gladstone himself could supply both the zeal and the ideas necessary for making up arrears of Liberalism he needed the official support of Bright. Bright represented the body of Radical opinion in the country, and it was essential for Gladstone to keep in touch with that ' left wing '. It was also desirable to have in the Cabinet the man who had done more than anyone to bring the country into the frame of mind which had made it give Gladstone a ' mandate ' to ' liberalize the institutions '.

Although Cabinet office might seem to set the seal on Bright's political achievement it soon appeared that it was important rather as a recognition of work done before than as a means to increased influence. ' Bright stood for a little on the summit of happy hours,' as Professor Trevelyan expresses it ; he had, in short, ' arrived ', and his unpopularity died away steadily. Opinion had, in many matters, caught up with him, so that he appeared now not a fanatic but a leader. Even farmers and landlords had forgiven him for his Free Trade work, since, so far, their prices and rents had kept up ; the peaceful

doctrines of Manchester had gained a general hold in the country ; the Reform debates had shown the greatness of his capacity and power.

The office which he accepted with reluctance he filled with small pleasure, though he held the position of President of the Board of Trade, a post concerned with those affairs which seemed most likely to interest him. A second serious illness, like that which incapacitated him after the Crimean War, came upon him before his first year of office was over. Early in 1870 he became unfit to work, and later in that year he resigned. Towards the end of the Ministry he was well enough to enter the Cabinet again, this time as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a post involving no departmental duties, but in neither this nor in his earlier post did he feel happy. Like Cobbett in Parliament, Bright in the Cabinet was out of his rightful and peculiar sphere. He found more effective use for his powers as an ' unofficial ' statesman than as an official one ; he was better fitted to lead an agitation than to manage a government department, better at fighting, missionizing, and educating opinion than at holding responsible office and compromising between various interests. His power was in consequence less after he entered the Cabinet than before. He played an important part in preparing the way for the work of Gladstone's Cabinet, but it had been played before he entered the Cabinet, and the many measures which the Liberal Government passed in ' liberalizing the institutions ' received little active help from him. ' I am on the shelf,' he declared in 1869, and it was true in one way, though far from being the whole truth.

Gladstone set to work to carry out his Liberal mandate by introducing the Secret Ballot, by making entry into the Civil Service depend on competitive examination, by abolishing purchase of Commissions in the Army, by putting education within the reach of every child. All these steps towards equalizing opportunity were in accordance with Bright's ideas, but health prevented him from giving more than a general support to them. Some-

times the actual shape taken by the Act was displeasing to him, and only illness explains the absence of protest from him against the form that the Education Act took. This Act, which set up Board Schools wherever there was a lack of schools and provided for their maintenance, partly out of local funds, partly out of central funds, and partly out of parents' fees, brought down the wrath of the Nonconformists by granting public money to ' denominational ' schools. Bright's own constituency, Birmingham, led the protests, and at the next election Gladstone's defeat was largely due to disgusted Nonconformists, who would rather vote for a Conservative Ministry than support one which could thus endow with taxpayers' money the teaching of denominational religion to the children of parents who might not believe in it. But Bright had no part in this opposition. He had, in earlier years, done much to bring opinion to desire universal education, but it was ' secular ' education that he wanted, and when he recovered his health he took little pleasure in the Act passed by the government of which he was a member. It is interesting to find him, in a speech at the previous election, putting forward a view that is more common in later days than it was at that time : ' As the school rate would rise,' he argued, against those who thought the expense of universal education too heavy to be undertaken, ' the poor rate and the crime rate would fall.'

In addition to ' retrenchment and reform ' two other main issues occupied the Liberal government between 1868 and 1874—Irish affairs and the maintenance of an even tenour of quiet policy abroad. As Gladstone was Bright's pupil in the matter of peace abroad he naturally had his keen support in submitting to arbitration the provocative claims made by the United States for compensation for the damages done by the ship *Alabama* during the War of the North and South. The country's acceptance of the terms awarded by the arbitrators suggests that here the teaching of Cobden and Bright on the value of peace and arbitration had altered public opinion.

On Ireland's grievances, as on other issues, Bright had

gone ahead of Gladstone. As early as 1849 he had seen the country and its wrongs with his own eyes, and had diagnosed the disease as agrarian and religious, agreeing with Disraeli's summary: 'An absentee aristocracy, a starving population, and an alien Church.' For twenty years he pressed Ireland's needs on first one party, then the other, with equal lack of success. He never faltered in his adherence to the Act of Union, but he urged Parliament to give the Irish tenant security in his holding and to free the country from the unjust burden of a Protestant Established Church. At different times he appealed to justice, to humanity, to true religion, and to expediency. 'Driven forth by poverty, Irishmen emigrate in great numbers, and wherever an Irishman sets his foot there stands an implacable enemy of England.' Bright's foresight was justified during the Great War of 1914-1918, when the large amount of Irish-American hatred for England was one of the factors that made it impossible for President Wilson to put the weight of the United States into the scales on the side of the Allies until 1917.

Fenianism, violent and supported by American money, inclined the country after 1866 to listen more attentively to Bright on this subject, and it was one of the first matters to engage Gladstone's attention when he became Prime Minister. His Land Act did not follow Bright's scheme for 'Land Purchase', but it gave some 'right' to tenants, as he had urged. Gladstone's disestablishment of the 'alien Church' was entirely to Bright's satisfaction.

The release from uncongenial official power that came with the Liberal defeat at the election of 1874 ended six years later, when Bright resumed his old office in Gladstone's second Ministry. He felt at least all his old reluctance, but was assured that the Prime Minister relied on him and his fellow member for Birmingham, Chamberlain, to represent the Radical element in the country. This government was fated to face many crises, and with slight credit to itself. To Bright it brought nothing but divided loyalties and disillusion, and

ended in his resignation on the subject of Egypt. A rising in Egypt, led by Arabi Pasha, was considered to impose on us the need to interfere on behalf of law and order, since we had money invested in the government of the country. Gladstone shared Bright's dislike of interference in the affairs of another country, but he was finally forced to send out troops, and when this was followed by the British bombardment of Alexandria Bright's loyalty to his leader was overcome by his detestation of his policy, and he resigned in 1882.

The resignation caused no personal alienation from Gladstone, but another of the troubles of that Ministry was soon to put an end to their relations, which for some time had been close and personal. Bright had asserted 'force is not enough' to settle the Irish problem, and so long as Gladstone's policy consisted of attempts to relieve the tenant of his oppression Bright agreed with him. But Gladstone, in 1885, was converted to the belief that Land Acts coupled with Coercion Acts promised no solution of the Irish problem, and yielding to the pressure of Parnell and the Land League, he introduced his Home Rule Bill. Bright loathed Parnell and his League, called them 'rebels' and would countenance no dealings with them. He thought Gladstone was grievously deceived. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was thrown out by the House of Commons, and Bright strongly deprecated his action in dissolving Parliament upon this defeat. It was, he declared, 'the greatest wound the party has received since it was a party'. But since Gladstone chose to risk splitting his party by making Home Rule an election issue, Bright felt no call to minimize the effects. In the election his attitude was of decisive importance in influencing the position taken by those Liberals whose party loyalty conflicted with their Nationalist principles. He spoke with his usual determination and clearness. Principle, he stated, must come before party. This was always his view, and he and Cobden had claimed in early days to vote on each question on its merits, not at the 'crack of the party whip'. It is remarkable that

while his refusal to follow Gladstone in his Home Rule conversion meant his alienation from his leader, it also brought upon him the violent hatred of the Irish Nationalists, whose hopes he had raised by the sympathetic insight which he had shown into the wrongs of Ireland in days when few English statesmen had realized the urgency and difficulty of Irish problems. One of these Nationalists has recently told how, when he first heard Bright speak in Ireland, in 1868, it ' was almost as if Bright had taken to himself the mantle and the policy of Daniel O'Connell '. They consequently expected that the man who understood their position so well and urged ' Land Purchase ' as a cure for the agrarian troubles would go the further step with them, and their disappointment caused them to attack Bright bitterly.

Bright had ceased to be a member of Gladstone's Cabinet several years before Home Rule became an official project, but his influence in the matter was greater than that of any Minister. The nature of the influence which he exerted on men and politics was such that it was always independent of position. His influence was personal, not official, so that he lost nothing when he left the Cabinet, as he had gained nothing when he entered it.

Bright was important in the Cabinet not for what he did, but for what he was, or, rather, for what he was not. He was not a member of those classes which, even after the first reform of Parliament, constituted governments and Cabinets ; others no doubt had felt towards him as Shaftesbury felt when he wrote : ' I have no satisfaction in following a person who is almost unfitted by his manners for educated society and of whom I never heard that he was honest or humane.' Further, he was not a member of the Established Church, the only Church generally considered fitting for a gentleman at that date, and membership of which had, until recently, been the only gateway to certain public positions in the eyes of the law, if not in fact. A Nonconformist in the Cabinet was a portent of a new age, and he used his position to lessen its portentousness in every way. He had begun his

attack on the Church of England's monopoly in his youthful campaign against compulsory tithes, and they were abolished in the first Gladstonian ministry ; he fought the exclusion of Dissenters from the Universities, and in 1871 he saw that form of Church monopoly ended too. His work did much, his own position did more, to establish the claims of the Dissenting bodies who had come to include so large a part of the nation, and who were, Bright declared, called upon ' to hope all things, to believe all things, and to endure all things '. Here again his dislike of inequalities of all sorts comes into play, and here again the Reform Bill of 1867, largely the result of his own labours, helped to realize his ideals, for many of the newly-enfranchised town householders were Dissenters and their needs were more likely to be satisfied when they became voters.

The greatness of Bright is generally held to have lain chiefly in his oratory, and yet the character of his greatness is far removed from that normally associated with an orator. His character was his greatness, and his speeches, wonderful though they are as oratory, owed their effect in the first place to their passionate sincerity. He claimed himself that he never used an argument in which he did not believe nor a fact that he had not reason for believing was true, and, when Disraeli envied him one speech, he replied, ' Well, you might have made it if you had been sincere.' Members of Parliament might despise him on social grounds, smart people might be insulted by being expected to meet him in society, but no one could deny that a rare sincerity, consistency, and disinterestedness shone through all Bright said or did. More, of course, goes to the making of good speeches than sincerity ; Bright spent much care and thought on his speeches ; he savoured his convictions with humour, he had a rare choice of words, impressive and moving, the effect of a life's study of the Bible and of Milton, and he had the indefinable gift of the orator, which made his meaning come home to the hearts of men. He was fortunate, too, in possessing a voice of rare beauty. The music of his voice

came as a great surprise to many hearers, whose one conception of Bright had been formed from *Punch* cartoons, where he appears as a burly prize-fighter.

The whole man is well summed up in an incident of his early manhood, when he found himself one of a group surrounding a poor man whose horse had just been killed. Expressions of sympathy were loud, when Bright turned to one of the sympathisers and said, 'I'm sorry five pounds. How sorry art thou?' Here was the real Bright, quick in sympathy but practical in its expression, alert to seize an opportunity for doing good and eager to bring others into the good work. An isolated man in many ways, Bright's fundamental remoteness meant no lack of warm sympathy. He loved children and family life, he sympathized with the masses, but that did not prevent him from rebuking fellow Radicals who criticized the Queen for sinking her royal position in that of the inconsolable widow: 'I am not accustomed to stand up in defence of those who are possessors of crowns', he told his surprised hearers, 'but a woman, be she a Queen of a great realm or the wife of one of your labouring men, who can keep alive a great sorrow for the lost object of her life and affection is not at all likely to be wanting in a great and generous sympathy with you.'

BOOKS ON BRIGHT

TREVELYAN: *Life of John Bright.*
MORLEY: *Life of Gladstone.*
T. P. O'CONNOR: *Memoirs of an Old Parliamentarian* (less favourable view).

CHAPTER VIII

MEN OF LETTERS AS REFORMERS

THE fights for reforms were waged by men of action, by philanthropists or political agitators, on the political battle-field; but the men of action found powerful allies in men of letters, whose pens rallied the indifferent to the cause of reform. Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley, and their fellows helped to create the atmosphere in which alone removal of social and political ills was possible.

Politicians and agitators could secure Parliamentary Inquiries into the dark places of the industrial world, and the Reports produced by such Inquiries contained enough shocking facts to stab the most sluggish conscience into activity. No one could read the Reports on the State of Large Towns, on the Employment and Condition of Children and Young Persons, or on the Employment of Chimney Sweepers, without feeling that something must be done. The trouble was that people did not read the Reports. Few people had even heard of Parliamentary Inquiries, and still fewer would look at a 'Blue Book', so that the disquieting facts remained uselessly buried. It was here that men of letters supplemented the work of the agitators. In novel, essay, or poem they embodied the material of Reports in acceptable literary form which secured its entry into thousands of homes where Blue Books would never have penetrated. Hidden in the jam of a story the reader swallowed the contents of a Parliamentary Report. Some novelists were more skilful than others in disguising the solid basis of the story; Dickens wove the two parts together into a coherent whole, while Charles Reade's novels were more inclined to consist of alternate layers of romance and Blue Book. Disraeli kept so close to the Reports which are embedded in

Sybil that when charged with exaggerating conditions, he was able to refer his accuser to the Reports, where were to be found not only the description of conditions but the actual conversations which Disraeli had reproduced.

The services of men of letters to reform went beyond the mere ' diffusion of knowledge '. A recital of facts leaves men's hearts untouched, but the same facts, represented as the experience of life of some imagined character in a novel, come home to the reader in an intimate way. By thus clothing the dry bones of the Reports in the flesh and blood of imagination, novelists and poets were able to rouse the public ' to sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not '.

Nearly every aspect of the social and political evils which afflicted England in the second quarter of the nineteenth century figured in some novel of the time. Mrs. Gaskell showed what was meant in terms of human suffering by the long hours in unventilated mills, by the refusal of employers to instal the devices necessary for the health and safety of their ' hands ', when she created Bessie Higgins in *North and South* ; and by the criminal carelessness in leaving machinery unfenced when she created *Mary Barton*. Kingsley's ghastly ' sweater's den ' where Alton Locke worked suggested to the public that small workshops could provide scenes of misery that were at least as bad as those known to exist in the larger mills. Here the workers, often employed on government contracts, were crowded together in unhealthy, close rooms, in insanitary houses, contracting as a matter of course consumption or fever and earning so little that some became prisoners in the house of their master, having been forced to pawn their clothes for the sake of food. Similar horrors in another small ' workshop ' trade were painted by Disraeli. The master nailers lived a life of utter brutality in an isolated district, free to work their will upon their apprentices, ' upon whom they habitually inflict punishments more grievous than the slave population of our colonies were ever visited with : not content with beating them with sticks and flogging them with

knotted ropes, they are in the habit of felling them with hammers or cutting their heads open with a file . . . they are worked for sixteen and even twenty hours a day; they are often sold by one master to another; they are fed on carrion and they sleep in cellars . . . they are stunted and deformed from the usual posture of their toil'. Dickens, followed later by Kingsley, exerted his skill in trying to stir up the curiously indifferent public to realize the horrors involved in the use of small boys for sweeping narrow chimneys. The wrong suffered by these boys was stamped on readers' minds by Dickens in the scene where Mr. Gamfield, the master sweep who 'did happen to labour under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death', offers to relieve the parish of the unwanted Oliver Twist, in return for five pounds. Gamfield explains to the presiding magistrate his practice: 'Boys is very obstinit and lazy, gentlemen, and there's nothing like a good hot blaze to make them come down [the chimney] with a run. It's humane, too, gentlemen, 'acause, even if they've stuck in the chimney, roasting their feet makes them struggle to hextricate theirselves.' Even the short-sighted magistrate sees the look of terror on Oliver's face and refuses to complete the bargain, despite Bumble's assurance that the boy 'doats on' chimney sweeping. But the convenience of the boys' labour was too strong for humane scruples to overcome, so that Kingsley, when he wrote *Water Babies* many years later, was moved to make his hero an ill-treated little sweep and his villain the master sweep. Tom 'cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw, and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day in the week, and when his master beat him, which he did every day in the week, and when he had not enough to eat, which happened every day in the week likewise'.

Truck—the practice of forcing men to take part of their wages in goods supplied by a store under the control of the master—was shown up in all its unfairness by Disraeli's description of a 'truck shop'. Two hundred

miners' wives are first kept waiting in the rain for two hours before the brutal shopkeeper sees fit to attend to them at all. With abuse, curses, and even blows this man compels the poor women to take expensive things for which they have no use, and charges them for his inferior stock prices far above those that they would have paid for better goods in the town. Refusal to accept what is offered is, the women know, visited by dismissal of the offender's husband from his job. On one occasion at least this abuse of an employer's authority even extended to thrusting on one unlucky miner two fancy waistcoats in place of money. As the miner truly remarked, 'The question now arises, What is a miner to do with two fancy waistcoats?'

It needed a writer's pen to do justice to the homes from which the workers came and to the environment of these homes. In *Bleak House* some of the conditions described in the Report on the State of Towns are illustrated in 'Tom-All-Alone's' where 'Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a black dilapidated street whose tumbling tenements contain by night a swarm of misery, breeding a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep in maggot numbers where the rain drips in; coming and going, fetching and carrying fever'. This is London; but Kingsley in *Yeast* and Disraeli in *Sybil* show that country towns and villages are in no way better; here are to be found cottages 'whose gaping chinks admitted every blast—whose thatch let in rain—whose floors were mud—before whose doors ran an open drain, full of refuse decomposing into disease—where typhus and cholera were normal incidents of life'. And Mrs. Gaskell brought home to those who had never seen them the full horror of the underground cellar dwellings which she saw in abundance in some Northern towns.

Poetry reinforced these attacks on the sympathies. Mrs. Browning put into her 'Cry of the Children' the pitiful conditions revealed by Shaftesbury's Report:

Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years ?

. . . . .

For all day, the wheels are droning, turning—
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn—our heads, with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places—
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling :
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall ;
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling ;
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.

Thomas Hood, too, dragged into the light of public knowledge one more class of unfortunate when he wrote for the Christmas number of *Punch* in 1843 (the year in which Mrs. Browning's poem appeared in a magazine), his 'Song of the Shirt' :

Work—work—work.
My labour never flags ,
And what are its wages ? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread—and rags.
That shattered roof—and this naked floor—
A table—a broken chair—
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there.

Oh, men with sisters dear,
Oh, men with mothers and wives,
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives.
Stitch—stitch—stitch—
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A shroud as well as a shirt.

Kingsley brought his gift for writing songs to aid Chadwick in his efforts to make the eyes and noses of those in authority sensible to the evils caused by absence of sewers, fresh water, and adequate burial-grounds. Kingsley tells of his river which ran at first :

Clear and cool, clear and cool,
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool ;

Cool and clear, cool and clear,
By shining shingle and foaming weir;

and then, after passing through a town,

Dank and foul, dank and foul,
By the smoky town in its murky cowl;
Foul and dank, foul and dank,
By wharf and sewer and slimy bank.

Dickens was another ally in the cause of sanitation; his revolting picture of a burial-ground, so overcrowded that there was not depth enough to cover the new coffins and hemmed in on every side by the houses of the living, roused town authorities to exert themselves, and *Punch* further stimulated them to action by a series of excellent cartoons depicting 'Hamlet in a London churchyard' and the Thames as 'The Silent Highwayman'; extorting health and wealth from the Londoner by its reeking banks and its tide strewn with all the refuse of the city. *Punch* needed all his wits and humour in his campaign with Chadwick and Dickens against the complacency which moved the Corporation of London to claim that 'the City of London for health, cleanliness, effective drainage, lighting and for supply of water to its inhabitants, cannot be surpassed'. He brought his letterpress to supplement the effect of cartoons, and a number of 1842 contains an amusing analysis of the component parts of Thames water: 'Vauxhall contributes lime, Lambeth pours forth a rich amalgam from the yards of knackers and bone-grinders. Horseferry liberally gives up all its dead dogs. Westminster empties its treasures into the mighty stream by means of a common sewer of no uncommon dimensions.'

The value of verse as propaganda was realized by the working class agitators. *Corn Law Rhymes* put into verse the wretchedness inflicted by 'taxes on food' on the poorest workers. Ebenezer Elliot was the author of these verses, which were generally written in the metre of some well-known song. The best known is

his ' Child, Is Thy Father Dead ? ' written in the metre of ' Robin Adair ' :

Child, is thy father dead ?
Father is gone !
Why did they tax his bread ?
God's will be done !
Mother has sold her bed :
Better to die than wed.
Where shall she lay her head ?
Home we have none.

Thomas Cooper, a shoemaker and a Chartist, tried to inspire his fellow workers with his verse to greater efforts on behalf of the Charter :

The time shall come when wrong shall end,
When peasant to peer no more shall bend,
When the lordly few shall lose their sway,
And the many no more their power obey.
Toil, brothers, toil, till the work is done,
Till the struggle is o'er and the Charter won.

There was also a quantity of verse of a vaguely inspiriting tone written by various working-class poets and of various merit. ' When Wilt Thou Save the People ? ' is still sung and appears in some hymn books, and the Political Unions of the Reform Bill years were heartened by an anonymous invocation to success based on peaceful methods :

God is our guide, no sword we draw,
We kindle not war's battle fires,
By union, justice, reason, law,
We claim the birthright of our sires.

The men of letters also opened men's eyes to evils less tangible than those that were made the subject of Parliamentary Inquiries. The absence of what Kingsley's Lancelot Smith speaks of as ' that uneconomic feeling called pity ', the bitter suspicion between masters and men, the workers' feeling of bewildered helplessness in the grip of forces that they could not understand, the grim

determination of the earliest generation of ' business men ' to run their works as they saw fit, without explanation to their ' hands '—all these things are laid bare in the pages of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* by Mrs. Gaskell, who lived among them herself ; by Charles Reade in *Put Yourself in His Place* ; and by Dickens, who well illustrates the poor man's bewilderment in Plornish of Bleeding House Yard, where ' they was all hard up, uncommon hard up . . . he couldn't say how it was, didn't know as anybody could say how it was, all he knowed was, that so it was ' ; some worked day and night and still were hardly able to live, many wanting work that they could not get ; ' as to who was to blame for it, Mr. Plornish didn't know who was to blame for it '. In *Hard Times* Dickens makes a more direct attack on the ' let-be ' attitude of the governing classes towards social ills. Mr. Gradgrind is the embodiment of Utilitarianism as it appeared to Dickens in later years, and Mr. Gradgrind sits in his study lined with Blue Books, constantly calculating something from them, ' probably that the Good Samaritan was a bad Economist '. *Coketown* stands for the essence of the Utilitarian creed, with everything for strict use and nothing for beauty or enjoyment, with its school where fancy is to be checked and the child is to make acquaintance with the cow not as the hero of a rhyme in which it jumps over the moon but as ' a graminivorous, ruminating quadruped with several stomachs '.

This more direct attack on the ' philosophy in office ' belongs more properly to the function of the essayist than the novelist, and it inspired Carlyle to write *Chartism* and *Past and Present* in the years when popular distress reached its climax. In form, Carlyle sets out to go more deeply into the ' Condition of England Question ' than the novelists whose work was less analytical than descriptive. In reality *Past and Present* did for the ' social problem ' very much what the novels did : it spread knowledge of wrongs and roused the kind of sympathy which results in action. Carlyle's claim to be ' a prophet

of social reform ' rests on his insight into the true nature of the evils which were causing the national sufferings between 1830 and 1850, not on any constructive proposals for their cure. He considers the ' Condition of England ' ; a million men with no work to do, though the country lacks the things they might be making ; a million sitting ' enchanted ' in workhouses, ' pleasantly so called because no work may be done in them ' ; a government which holds aloof, throwing out catchwords to the wretches— ' *laissez-faire* ', ' supply-and-demand ', ' over-production '; a working-class desperate for guidance and ready to break forth into more of that ' Manchester Insurrection ' which had first turned Carlyle's attention to the distracted state of the nation.

He looks for the mind of the governing classes who allow this to go on ; he takes each of their catchwords in turn, examining it from all points of view, the human as well as the economic, and his general conclusion is that no human community can be bound together by such doctrines as ' *laissez-faire* ' and ' cash payment the sole nexus '. Liberty, he admits, may be divine, but what when it only means liberty to starve ? ' Enlightened egotism though never so luminous ' contains no clue to the conduct of a nation's life ; supply-and-demand as a principle regulating economic affairs has produced the present state in which ' millions of spun shirts hang there by the million unsaleable, and here, by the million, are diligent bare backs that can get no hold of them '. The ' double dose of liberty ' prescribed by ' Benthamee Radicalism ' contains no cure for the disease, and ' Reform Ministries ' are barren as the east wind. The nation's rulers, he urges, must show their fitness to rule by finding cures for the evils. He alludes with some vagueness to National Education, State-aided emigration, State inspectors ; but there is no vagueness in his insistence that the problems must be grappled with, and that the responsibility belongs to the nation's rulers. He is no democrat ; extension of the franchise appears to him an illusory benefit, only enabling the newly

enfranchised to make the idle boast: 'Behold now, I too have my twenty-thousandth part of a talker in our National Palaver'; the aristocracy must lead the nation out of the dark ways that it has lately been treading.

Carlyle sounded a call to action, a call which echoed down the coming years, constantly stimulating fresh readers to fling themselves into the fight against social wrongs. Ruskin was inspired by Carlyle to attack the mind of the Manchester School, which dominated the attitude to social questions in his day as the Utilitarian philosophy influenced it in Carlyle's own day. Matthew Arnold and the Christian Socialists challenged accepted opinion on the same lines, while the later years of the century saw the influence of Carlyle still sweeping fresh pioneers of reform into action.

Carlyle's insight caused him to perceive, with Owen, that the problem set for solution by the industrial changes was one of distribution, and that on its solution the future prosperity of the country depended. 'Let inventive men,' he pleads 'cease to spend their existence incessantly contriving how cotton can be made cheaper and try to invent how cotton can be justlier divided among us.' It was not enough, though undeniable, that Yorkshire and Lancashire were growing steadily richer; wealth is not welfare, and its distribution is as important as its amount. A change of heart in the governing and employing classes was necessary if a satisfactory solution of this problem of distributing the newly-created wealth was to be found.

Carlyle and the other men of letters were, in short, adding to the nicely calculated sums of the politicians and business men those 'imponderables' which in human society constitute the only true values. Men, they were reminding the public, do not live by bread alone, not even by the cheaper bread secured by the Free Traders. Classes are made up of individuals to whom every 'fact' in the economists' lists means so much misery or happiness. Let the public use its sympathetic imagination

and see the reverse side of the shield on which the nation is inscribing Progress, Wealth, and Prosperity.

On occasion this mission took the writers on to the opposite side, leading them to criticize some reform that had been made. The ' New Poor Law ' of 1834 wrung from Dickens the bitter protest of *Oliver Twist*, just as the Old Poor Law had inspired Crabbe's famous description of the wretched ' House that holds the parish poor '. The authors and commissioners of this reform saw with pride the number of paupers reduced by nearly half; ratepayers saw with equal pleasure the poor rate proportionately lowered, but *Oliver Twist* forced home the realization that this boon was obtained only at a price—the price of great suffering among the most helpless people of the country. ' The reducing dietary, to be sure, came a bit expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in undertakers' bills, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of the paupers that fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms. But the number of workhouse inmates grew thin as well as the paupers.' The meaning of the ' reformed dietary ' which helped to secure lower rates could never be forgotten by those who read the scene where Oliver, terrified but maddened by hunger, ' advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, " Please, sir, I want some more." The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder, the boys with fear '. The ' Board ', informed of this unheard of outrage, could not believe their ears: ' Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that this boy asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary? ' The efforts of Dickens, Cobbett, *Punch*, and the agitators in the Northern towns were unable to shake the New Poor Law (Carlyle said that you might as well have a Bill to set up a parish Exterminator at once), but its full rigour was slightly softened, and in some parts of the country it was only put into full force gradually, its

introduction extending over a number of years in industrial districts. Charles Reade, in the same way, was roused to show up the defects of Prison reforms, in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*. The old prisons had stood in dreadful need of reform, but Reade brought home to the public that the new ' scientific ' prisons, despite their clean cells, ' as white as driven snow ', and the disappearance of the old insanitary overcrowding, could be more cruel than the old. Solitary and silent confinement might cause more suffering to the mind than discomfort had caused to the body, and calculated inhumanity could be worse than thoughtless brutality.

Dickens knew that many social ills arose out of political abuses, and his pictures of some of the outworn institutions that made up the boasted English Constitution did much to loosen their traditional hold on public acceptance. In his ' Circumlocution Office ' Dickens let the public into the secret of official incompetence, corruption, family influence and contempt of the country's interests which lurked in many government departments, all excelling ' in the Art of Not Getting It Done ', and all manned in every branch by members of the ' Tite Barnacle ' family. Another of these dead bits that remained embedded in the living flesh of the governmental system was the Court of Chancery, ' suitably found (on a foggy day) in the foggiest centre of the fog . . . which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire, its worn-out lunatics in every mad-house and its dead in every churchyard . . . and its ruined suitors borrowing and begging the round of their acquaintance '.

It was not the work of men of letters to furnish programmes of reform. Their task was done when they had described conditions with a compelling force which would enable statesmen and reformers to do their part. Carlyle did not offer any very practical suggestions for remedies in *Past and Present*, but he startled men into a closer examination of their social consciences and into a feeling of responsibility for the continuance of wrongs. Dickens's part was not to devise new systems of education but to

describe that practised at Dotheboys Hall in such a way that others would be impelled to think out a better : ' We go,' Mr. Squeers explained, ' upon the practical mode of teaching. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n-d-e-r, W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of the book, he goes and does it. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em ' (by weeding Mr. Squeers's garden).

NOTES ON NOVELISTS' REFERENCES TO SOCIAL CONDITIONS

SWEEPS : *Oliver Twist*, Chapter III. 1837.
Waterbabies, Chapters I and VIII. 1863.
TRUCK : *Sybil*, Book VI, Chapter VII. 1844.
HOUSING : *Bleak House*, Chapter XVI. 1852.
Yeast, Chapter II and XIII. 1848.
Sybil, Chapter III.
RIVER POLLUTION : *Water Babies*, Chapter II.
BURIAL GROUNDS : *Bleak House*, Chapter XVI.
POOR LAW : *Oliver Twist*, Chapters I, II, and IV.
FACTORIES : *North and South*, Chapters XIII.
Mary Barton, Chapters III and XIII. 1848.
SMALLER WORKSHOPS : *Sybil*, Book III, Chapter IV.
Alton Locke, Chapter II. 1850.
EDUCATION : *Nicholas Nickleby*, Chapters IV, VII, and VIII. 1839.
GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND LAW COURTS . *Bleak House*, Chapters I, II, and IV ; *Little Dorritt*, Chapter X. 1857.
ATTITUDE OF EMPLOYERS : *Mary Barton*, Chapters I, III, XV, etc.
Little Dorritt, Chapter XII.
UTILITARIANISM : *Hard Times*. 1854.
TRADE UNIONS : *Put Yourself in His Place* (C. Reade).
PRISONS : *It's Never Too Late to Mend* (C. Reade).

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS REFERRED TO

Commons Committee on State of Large Towns, 1845.
Royal Commission on the Employment and Condition of Children and Young Persons. 1st Report, 1842 : Mines. 2nd Report, 1843.
Employment of Chimney-Sweepers, 1817, 1818, 1834, 1840.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

A PERIOD of time covered by the lives of six men is bound to have ragged ends, but the space covered by the effective public life of these six reformers can be reduced to some kind of unity. Cobbett, Owen, and Place all became prominent in the last years of the Napoleonic Wars, when Place entered Westminster politics, when Owen began to put his ideas before the world, and when Cobbett's journalism first won him a place among the working class. And as all three entered public life more or less at the same time, so all three ceased to exert influence about the year 1836. Cobbett died in 1835, and at about the same time Owen left the political world for his ' New Moral World ', so ceasing to affect the affairs in which he had been playing so large a part. Place, although for a few years longer he took part in working-class activities, was decreasingly active after 1836. Thus, although their actual lives covered the years from 1762 to 1854 their important work lay almost wholly in the quarter of a century that ended with the death of Cobbett in 1835.

In the same way a defined period can be made out of the lives of the other three, though in point of time they stretch from the birth of Shaftesbury in 1801 to the death of Bright in 1889. Shaftesbury's public career began after the Reform Bill of 1832, that of Cobden and of Bright in 1839. Cobden died in 1865, twenty years before Shaftesbury and twenty-four years before Bright, but the importance of Bright as a ' pioneer of reform ' might be taken to end in 1868 ; and though Shaftesbury continued to work for philanthropic causes till he died, his career as an agitator for reforms belongs to the same period as Bright's.

The characteristic work of these men was, in fact, done before 1868, when the conditions which had called it forth and made it necessary were beginning to pass away. The Reform Bill of 1867 brought to an end that stage of 'representative government' in which the working classes had been shut out from a place in the Constitution. The time was at hand when the wrongs of the workers could be set right by the workers themselves, through the votes with which they could influence the House of Commons or through their industrial organizations. The comparative prosperity of the mid-Victorian years did not leave the working classes where it found them; in Friendly Societies, in Co-operative Societies, in Trade Unions they had learnt to organize, to understand their true needs and to direct their energies effectively towards their attainment. The lessons of Place and Owen had been learnt.

It was, moreover, unnecessary to fight any longer for the principle of State interference. Both parties accepted 'social legislation' as a matter of course, and the struggle that Professor Dicey has described as one between Individualism and Collectivism had ended in a victory for Collectivism, a result which the opponents of Shaftesbury, though not Shaftesbury himself, had foretold would follow upon his work. There was no longer need for agitators to press social legislation on governments, since Liberals and Conservatives alike put forward measures concerned with the 'condition of the people'. Finally, the distressful earlier years of the century had given way to a more prosperous period. The worst evils of the transition had been perceived and remedies attempted.

Later developments showed that the contentment of the middle years was only a temporary lull, and Shaftesbury and Bright almost lived on into the new troubles that the new age was bringing to birth. Agriculture fell into distress once more after 1875, and our industrial supremacy began to feel the competition of foreign countries to whom the Industrial Revolution at last came.

A 'social survey' revealed the horrifying fact that 32 per cent of the London population lived below 'the poverty line', and class bitterness grew as the century drew to its close. New agitations arose too. Bright lived long enough to know and hate Parnell, prince of agitators, though he was spared the later type of movement that afflicted the new century—strikes and Suffragette displays.

But though the lull that followed 1867 was only short-lived, and although new discontents and agitations arose, they called for new cures. Pioneers of reform had done their work. The new discontented wanted, not relief through the work of others, but control of the governmental machinery; they could work under their own leaders and officials, without outside leadership. Philanthropic reform like Shaftesbury's can never be perfectly complete, but in later years the humanitarian devotion and service had to be given a different direction. What could be achieved through legislation had been done, so that the philanthropist, instead of agitating for action by Parliament, had to fill up by private effort the gaps inevitably left in the law.

A recent French historian raised the question why England escaped revolution in the first half of the last century. Part of the answer to his question can be found in the lives of such men as Cobbett, Owen, Place, Shaftesbury, Cobden, and Bright. In their several ways, from different angles, they understood the needs of those among whom revolution might have been expected to arise. They helped the victims of the new society, they taught and encouraged them to help themselves, they forced an irresponsible governing class to consider the claims of other classes. And by this twofold influence they made the discontented feel that something was being done for them and taught them to await the issue in patience instead of resorting to violence.

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